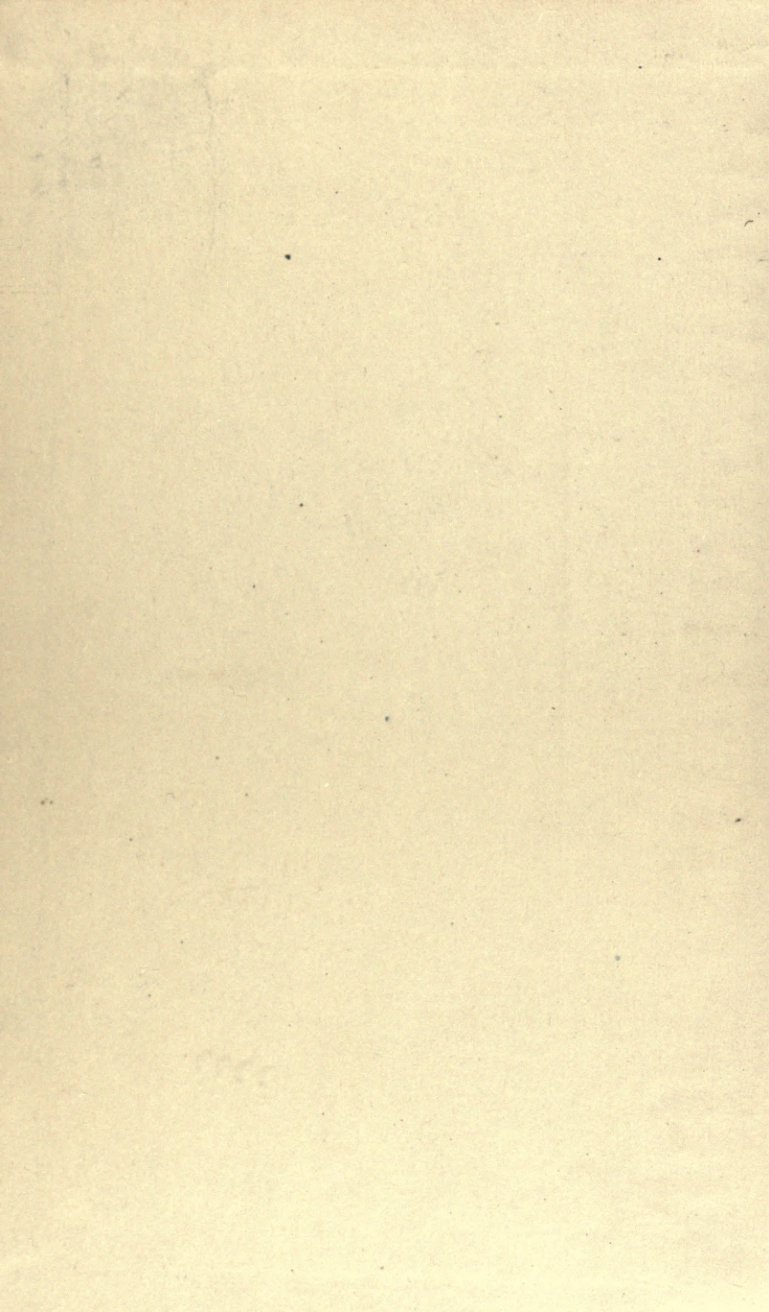
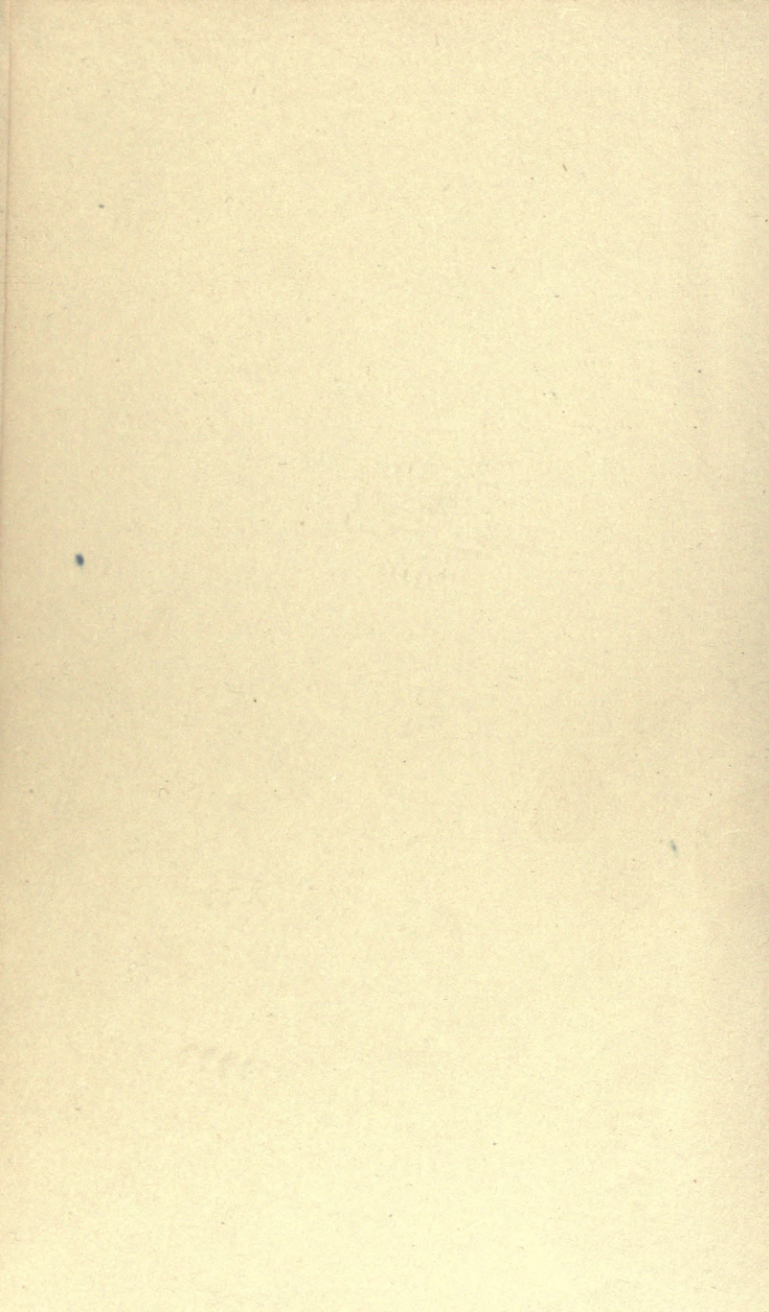


Pleasures of
Literature

Robert Aris Willmott





PLEASURES OF LITERATURE

BY

ROBERT ARIS WILLMOTT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CRANSTOUN METCALFE

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK & LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1907

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

INTRODUCTORY

I

A WITTY man of letters has suggested that books which have any pretension to be ranked as literature may be divided into two classes—those which are read by everybody for a little while and thereafter read by nobody, and those which are read by somebody for ever. The number of writers who are represented in both classes is not large, but among them is Robert Aris Willmott, the subject of this brief note.

He was born on the 30th of January, 1809, at Bradford in Wiltshire, the son of a solicitor, a man of somewhat impracticable disposition, according to the writer of the article about his son in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the sport of capricious fortune in respect of his pecuniary affairs. He was, however, in a position to give his son a good education, sending him first to the the Merchant Taylors' School, and afterwards to

Harrow. The son manifested his intellectual bias at an early age, and achieved rapid success. While still at Harrow he brought out the first number of *The Harrovian*, and within two years of leaving school he was a contributor to several periodical publications of repute, of which we need not name more than *Frazer's Magazine*. At the end of 1828, he left Harrow, and obtained an appointment as private tutor at the handsome salary of £300 a year. He retained the appointment for about two years. In 1832, he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, but he did not matriculate until 1834, and he did not graduate until 1841. He supported himself at the university by writing, and seven published volumes attest his industry during that period. His literary activities seem to have caught the attention of the master. Willmott was so unfortunate as to take lodgings in a house not licensed for that purpose by the college, and he was in danger of being disallowed the terms during which he had resided there. This was a serious matter for one whose financial position was by no means assured, and he appealed to the authorities to release him from the predicament in which he had ignorantly placed himself. This they were able to do; and when communicating

the satisfactory news to his mother, Willmott mentions that the master referred to his achievements as an author, and hinted that while he was still in a state of pupilage he might find it advantageous to restrict his intellectual labours to the curriculum prescribed for the schools. The master does not appear to have insisted, however, and the undergraduate must have displayed some diplomatic skill in a delicate situation. He comments rather grimly to his mother on the compulsion laid upon him to write if he would read, and no more is heard of the matter.

In 1842, Willmott was ordained deacon, being licensed to St. James's, Radcliffe, where he remained for two years and won popularity. His health, however, gave way, and he moved first to Chelsea Hospital, where he stayed only three months, and next to Launton in Oxfordshire. It was 1846 that was the year of his emancipation from this state of unrest. John Walter, of *The Times*, had lately built the Church of St. Catherine, at Bear Wood, and, the edifice having been consecrated, appointed Willmott first incumbent of the living. John Walter died the following year, and the sermon which Willmott preached on the occasion of his funeral remains proof of the

preacher's sincere admiration and genuine gratitude. The Walter who succeeded to Bear Wood continued to show the greatest possible generosity and kindness to the incumbent; his stipend was raised to the respectable sum of £400 a year, a substantial house was built for him for which he paid no rent, and Willmott, who was unmarried, surely had reason to consider himself an exceptionally fortunate man, in spite of the constant charge imposed upon his purse by an invalid mother and sister.

Here he devoted himself to literature. In 1847, he published his *Life of Jeremy Taylor*, as the author of which he always thereafter described himself. In 1848, he brought out a second, greatly enlarged, edition of his *Poems*, the first edition of which appeared seven years previously; in 1849, *A Journal of Summer-time in the Country* first saw the light, next to the present work in merit and popularity; it went into several editions, one, well illustrated, in 1858, and a fourth edition, with a biographical memoir of the author by his sister Cornelia, in 1864, the year after his death; in 1850, he published an anthology entitled *Precious Stones from Prose Writers of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries*; and in 1857, *Poets of the*

Nineteenth Century, a really well-illustrated and interesting anthology; in 1862, his volume of *English Sacred Poetry* appeared. During this period, he also edited for Routledge's *British Poets* the poems of Gray, Parnell, Collins, Green, Warton, Akenside, Dyer, Cowper, Burns, selections from Wordsworth and James Montgomery, Percy's *Reliques*, Fairfax's translation of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Goldsmith's *Poems*, and the poetical and prose works of George Herbert. It is a creditable record of patient literary work, done without any manifestation of exceptional editorial ability or critical acumen, but conscientiously and adequately done nevertheless. The Saturday Reviewer of whom we shall have occasion to speak presently, talks of Willmott's "housewifely care," and the phrase pleases us, as apt and not unkind as it was meant to be. These were Willmott's contributions to the class of books which everybody reads for a while, and nobody reads thereafter; perhaps the *Journal of Summer-time in the Country* must be removed from it, but without that the contribution is generous. Willmott was known as a capable editor, and he certainly tasted success.

Last of all we must specify *Pleasures of*

Literature, his one undeniable addition to the class of books which somebody will always read. It was first published in 1851, and, as will be seen presently, went into a fifth edition during its author's life, while no less than five editions published in German before 1858.

Since Willmott's days were not to be prolonged, it is rather sad to know that they were not lived out to their close at Bear Wood, with which place he will always be associated, and where he would seem to have enjoyed the delightful, honourable, and useful life of the country parson. In 1861 "differences arose with the patron, and Willmott resigned the benefice in May, 1862, on a pension of £160 per annum:" thus writes the contributor to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, without going into particulars. Miss Cornelia Willmott refers briefly to the sorry business in her memoir of her brother to which reference has been made. It seems that Willmott was anxious to bring out a new edition of his *Life of Jeremy Taylor*, and desired for that purpose to repurchase the copyright of the book, with which he had parted. Not having sufficient funds at his disposal, he applied for assistance to the patron of the living, apparently offering as security for the loan a charge

upon some life insurance policy. Mr. Walter, however, did not choose to accede to the request, and, according to Miss Willmott, the refusal was accompanied by such an alteration in his behaviour that her brother's health was affected thereby. The friction grew, and at last Willmott threw up the living. Reading between the lines, it is impossible to escape the impression that the son had inherited the "somewhat impracticable disposition" of the father. A pension of £160 a year was accorded to him, but it was accompanied by the most unusual stipulations that he should remain unmarried which, his sister remarks, did not trouble him at all and that he should not only refrain from taking part in any service in St. Catherine's Church, but never again come within ten miles of the parish.

It was exile, and it may be said to have killed him. He moved to Nettlebed in Oxfordshire, and proceeded with his literary occupations, but his health was broken; a visit to the seaside afforded but little benefit, and he returned to Nettlebed, where he was seized with paralysis. He died on the 27th of May, 1863, and was buried, one is glad to know, at Bear Wood.

II

Pleasures, Objects, and Advantages of Literature was the cumbrous title with which this "discourse" was introduced to the world by Thomas Bosworth in 1851. The first edition opens with a preface of which the principal part, likening the readers of the work to a party of travellers comparing notes upon the scenes which they had visited, was afterwards incorporated in the last chapter; the preface is tinged with a certain self-complacency which would seem to have been characteristic of the author. "He hopes that his errors are neither serious nor many; but the recollection of a remark upon a former publication induces him to say, that he is in the habit of writing the names of painters and authors as they appear in the classical Criticism and Biography of the eighteenth century—in Warton, Gilpin, Price, and Reynolds—without reference to the latest Handbook or Dictionary. To any graver objections he can only reply by adopting the request of one of the oldest living poets in England, that all the fault-finders will sit down immediately, and excel him as much as they can; which he sincerely desires may be as much as they please."

Of the second and third editions I have seen no copy, in that respect apparently being as little fortunate as the writer of the article on Willmott in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, who only mentions the first, fourth, and fifth editions, of which copies are in the library of the British Museum. The fourth, revised, edition was published in 1855 by Messrs. G. Routledge & Co. It reproduces the original preface, and adds a further prefatory note, to the effect that the marginal references which were a feature of its precursors have been omitted in order to permit of the compression of the text within the space allotted to it. The revision had been careful, and it is interesting to see the author at work, as it were, anxiously scrutinising his own performance, balancing words and phrases, deliberating over punctuation, and painfully seeking to improve the book in every particular. The great difference between the fourth and the first edition lies in the arrangement of the material. What had been Chapter VI. now becomes Chapter I.; Chapters I. III. and II. are united to form Chapter II.; Chapters IV. and V. together constitute Chapter III.; Chapters XII. to XVII. become Chapters IV. to IX., both in-

clusive; Chapters XVIII. and XIX. are combined to form Chapter X.; Chapters XX., VII., and VIII. form Chapter XI.; Chapter IX. becomes Chapter XII.; the first half of Chapter XXIV. with the whole of Chapters X. and XI. makes Chapter XIII.; while Chapters XXII., XXIII., XXI., and the second half of XXIV. are combined to make Chapter XIV.; thereafter, the original sequence is preserved, but six chapters are paired together and numbered as three. All this shows sedulous care, and the book is undoubtedly improved by the rearrangement. The textual alterations and additions are also considerable.

Five years later, in 1860, the fifth, enlarged, edition was published by Messrs. Bell & Daldy. From this the original preface disappears, the simile of the travellers being transferred to the final chapter, but otherwise the arrangement of the fourth edition is adhered to; there are many additions to the text, tending upon the whole to the improvement of the work; a list of books referred to in the text is appended; and "a few short passages are introduced from anonymous contributions of the writer's earlier pen, and he names them here lest he should be suspected

of owing to others a debt which is due to himself."

This last remark is not without significance. Willmott was in considerable request as an editor, but, despite his remarks on p. 87 of this volume on the subject of plagiarism, he would seem to have been uncertain occasionally as to the distinction between adaptation of common material and appropriation of the work fashioned from it by others. A Saturday Reviewer, for example, criticising his edition of Percy's *Reliques*, published in 1857, waxes sarcastic on this point, and is at pains to print Willmott's note on the metre of *Piers Plowman* parallel with Wright's note on the same subject published fifteen years earlier, a note certainly accessible to Willmott and almost certainly consulted by him. We are free to confess that Willmott lays himself open to attacks of this kind, but a plausible defence may be suggested. He was a widely read man, with a retentive memory, and he had a marked liking for the apothegm. It is charitable to suppose that he gave his readers credit for being as well informed as himself, and consequently for requiring less scrupulosity on his part in the matter of references and use of inverted commas. He may have been indiscreet,

but he was not deliberately immoral. Moreover, wisdom came to him with the years. In the first edition of this work, in the chapter on "The Accountability of Authors," he says of the deadly properties which a book may possess, that a book is even more than the life treasured up, which Milton considered it to be: "It is the soul disengaged from matter. It is a fountain that flows for ever. What should be done to the man who lavished his fortune in naturalising a fever, and organised a system of propagating the plague through the post-office? The execration of the world would drive him into the wilderness. Yet it has been thought that a man had better be defiled in his blood than in his principles." That is a moral reflection, trenchantly worded, and of prime importance to the case. But except for the words "it has been thought," in the concluding sentence, there is nothing to suggest that the thought and the language are not both justly attributable to Willmott himself. Perhaps he may have taken to heart the admonition conveyed to him by the Saturday Reviewer, for in the fifth edition, published three years after the vigorous castigation of him, he retains the passage, but prefixes to it the words "Jeremy Collier asked,"

thus conceding the credit for the laudable inquiry to him who first propounded it. Counsel for the defence will not fail, moreover, to refer in other doubtful passages to the first edition, where the marginal references frequently give chapter and verse for some of the sublime and sonorous aphorisms embodied in the text.

And how admirable they are! Line follows line, page succeeds page, each glowing with rich imagery, all progressing with measured tread to the predetermined goal. Stylists whose reputation rests upon performance know what delicacy of feeling, what fineness, coupled with certainty, of touch, are necessary to a man who would excel in work of this nature. Scholarship paraded becomes wearisome as pedantry; ornament in excess is offensive as ostentation; moral reflections impertinently introduced affront the intelligence and forfeit interest. One false note will mar the entire composition, and the danger increases in direct ratio with the degree of its elaboration. Unless protected by the talisman of sincerity, the pomp of the utterance degenerates into pomposity, and what appealed to the imagination as being simple and moving will be perceived by the intellect to be affected and untrue.

Sincerity is the saving grace and the supreme merit of *Pleasures of Literature*. Whatever may have been the shortcomings of Robert Aris Willmott in his personal relations with his patrons, whatever the limitations to his genius as an editor, he must be declared to have been ever a loyal and reverential servant to his chosen mistress, Literature. He was not one of those who "go in for" literature in order to supplement their income, as some men "go in for" keeping poultry, or some women for making lace. Nor was he one to tolerate the suggestion that his literary occupations were in the least derogatory to the dignity of his profession as ordained minister of God's Word. His point of departure is made clear in the two quotations prefixed to every edition of this work, from Bishop Hall's *Epistle to Mr. Milward*, and from Crabbe's poem *The Borough*. Willmott turned to letters as Herbert turned to his viol, each using his gift to the greater glory of God, and gathering pleasure the while. If to modern ears their music seems quaint, modernity has only one more claim upon the pity of those who know that the joy of a thing of beauty is constant, and that if it ceases to be appreciated the explanation is to be found in some defect in the sight of the beholder.

In submitting any criticism of a book of the kind here reproduced, it is necessary to refer always to the personality of its author, and it would be only fair to recall the characteristic note of the period in which he lived. "Academic" is a word which has been applied with some disdain to *Pleasures of Literature*. But if the word is to be permitted to bear a scornful interpretation, it must be modified in the present case. The schoolmaster was abroad when Willmott flourished. The influence of that exasperating genius may be traced in most books of the period that do not indisputably belong to the front rank of literature. It is immediately perceptible in Willmott's editorial work, and it permeates his letters. To a small extent it may have affected this particular work. But Willmott was a man who never came into his own kingdom. He was a born preacher, and it is a loss to English literature that more of his sermons have not been preserved. We know from his sister that he took the greatest possible pains over their preparation, but it does not appear that he himself rated the finished result particularly high. Yet in his life his reputation as a pulpit orator was considerable. "One of the most admirable preachers of our time," Henry

Christmas calls him, and gives his portrait as a frontispiece to his interesting book on *Preachers and Preaching*, published in 1858. The extracts which he makes from Willmott's sermons are numerous and of unequal merit, but one must be reproduced here:

"The lone Hebrew woman rises from her grave to inspire me. She fed the prophet with a little cake, and the granaries of heaven nourished her barrel of meal; she gave him a little water in a vessel to drink, and the olive-trees of Eden seem to bear fruit again that her cruse might run over with oil."

It is in that manner that he wrote *Pleasures of Literature*. He is not the pedagogue, but the priest proclaiming the revelation of God's truth in the richest language at his command. He stands robed in his pulpit, and adorns his discourse with the rarest gems of poetry and the most gorgeous decoration of scholarship. Whether or not there is anything new in his message he does not pause to consider; the only thing that matters is that all of it is true.

"There is a sound of solemn sadness in the saying that the glory of man is but as the flower of grass—a more perishable thing than the grass itself, more alluring to the eye, but exposed to fiercer enemies, and to the swifter ruin of the scythe. They are gone—the tyrants of ancient dynasties, with their splendour and cruelty—and have bequeathed to their successors the warning voice of the prophet, 'Where will ye leave your glory?' Think of the question having been asked of Sesostris, or Bel-

shazzar! But so it comes to pass. Their magnificence is taken off like robes and crowns when a coronation is over. The great Conqueror strikes his sword into life, and a gulf yawns between Cæsar and his legions. The glory remains on this side of the chasm. The light of an empire dies out, like embers on a cottager's hearth. All the flashing shields of Persia, with the throne of Xerxes in the midst, could not cast one ray into the shadows. How is the King to summon his guard? What bridges may swing across the darkness between eternity and time?"

Again:

"What are poets, philosophers, and men of splendid enterprise, but the chivalry of Genius, going forth, in the morning of their strength, to vanquish enemies of virtue, release captive souls, and bring back treasures of renown? How dazzling is the march with Fame in the van! Many depart, few return. Some die in battle; some are borne from it wounded; some triumph, only to faint in the desert with the well in sight. So the tale of literature has its toll as well as its trumpet; the coronation encloses a funeral; and the banner of victory droops over the bier of the conqueror. But the eyes and ears of the living see and hear only the rejoicings and the honours of the departed. The trumpet drowns the toll; the conflict is forgotten in the conquest; the death is illuminated by the crown. So it should be. As one plume sinks, another eager foot climbs the steep. The dead ever speak to the weary, ever cheer the brave, ever beckon the hopeful to the temple, that shines with its own inward sun and glorifies time and thought."

Lack of novelty in these two passages may be admitted at once, but was the truth that they contained ever expressed more richly?

For the rest, the book is full of the soundest

advice to those who are fain to take service in the Temple of Literature, as it is full of suggestion to those susceptible but uncreative spirits that would worship there but can contribute nothing to its *armarium*.

"The exhibition of real strength is never grotesque. Distortion is the agony of weakness. It is the dislocated mind whose movements are spasmodic."

There, in three lines, is a truth the considered application of which might prove the salvation of modern realism.

Of modern criticism:

"If there be in it little of the splenetic heart of a former century, we find abundance of untimely fruit, and confident foreheads. Its defects are twofold,—a want of modesty, and a want of knowledge. A remedy for the former is to be found in the removal of the latter. A short novitiate of five years would sow the mind. The true critic, like the deep philosopher, produces his opinions as doubts. Only the astrologer and the empyric never fail."

Many are the epigrams and apologies to which one would like to direct particular attention.

"The advantages of poetry are many, as its pleasures are common. It makes dark weather fair, and blue skies bluer. The dismallest day—a giant of clouds—sinks before it. Not only Shakespeare and Milton bear the sling; the fatal pebble may be taken from a village brook. The insolent Philistine, who lords it over a noble spirit, is often vanquished and plundered by one of a ruddy countenance, coming from the country and the sheepfold."

And of the attractions of poetry other than intellectual:

“Next to its language is the tone of its voice. It makes love to the ear, and wins it with music.”

The individual charm of the writing throughout this book is that it is above all things musical. It gradually enchains the interest of the most indifferent, and it haunts the memory of all. And the merit of the performance is that the book is so much better than a catalogue of the charms of literature. The author communicates to others the sensations which have vibrated in himself, and infects us with the enthusiasm, the divine possession, which has been the motive power and the supreme delight of his own existence.

CRANSTOUN METCALFE.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE DESIGN AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS DISCOURSE	1
II. THE LONG LIFE OF BOOKS . . .	5
III. CLASSICAL STUDIES: THEIR ASSO- CIATIONS AND INTEREST . . .	11
IV. MENTAL DELIGHTS OF EARLY LIFE .	19
V. TASTE, ITS NATURE AND CHARMS .	24
VI. TASTE, AN INHERITANCE AND A FASHION	29
VII. A PURE TASTE SELDOM FOUND .	34
VIII. TASTE PUTS AN AUTHOR IN A FAVOURABLE LIGHT	41
IX. BOOKS WHICH ARE ADAPTED TO DIF- FERENT SEASONS	47
X. DILIGENCE, THE HANDMAID OF TASTE	52
XI. CRITICISM, ITS CURIOSITIES AND RE- SEARCHES	58

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. CRITICISM ENFORCES UNITY OF PURPOSE	75
XIII. CRITICISM THE SOURCE OF MANY DELIGHTS	79
XIV. THE LESSONS OF CRITICISM	89
XV. POETRY, ITS SHAPES AND BEAUTIES	99
XVI. SATIRE EXCLUDED FROM POETRY	117
XVII. THE DRAMA, ITS CHARACTER AND ENTERTAINMENT	119
XVIII. THE CONSOLATIONS OF POETRY	127
XIX. FICTION: THE ROMANCE AND THE NOVEL	136
XX. HISTORY AND ITS LESSONS	153
XXI. HOME VIEWS OF HISTORY—BIOG- RAPHY	169
XXII. LITERATURE OF THE PULPIT	195
XXIII. PHILOSOPHY AND ITS DELIGHTS	205
XXIV. THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES	210
XXV. DOMESTIC INTERIORS OF LEARNING	215
XXVI. ACCOUNTABLENESS OF AUTHORS	225
XXVII. THE CULTIVATED MIND AND THE UNINFORMED	232
XXVIII. THE PARTING WORD	237
BOOKS QUOTED	241

“ I CAN wonder at nothing more than how a man can be idle—but of all others, a scholar,—in so many improvements of reason, in such sweetness of knowledge, in such variety of studies, in such importunity of thoughts. To find wit in poetry; in philosophy, profoundness; in history, wonder of events; in oratory, sweet eloquence; in divinity, supernatural light and holy devotion—as so many rich metals in their proper mines,—whom would it not ravish with delight ? ”

BISHOP HALL: *Epistle to Mr. Milward.*

“ Comforts, yea ! joys ineffable they find,
Who seek the prouder pleasures of the mind:
The soul, collected in those happy hours,
Then makes her efforts, then enjoys her powers.
No! ’t is not worldly gain, although, by chance,
The sons of learning may to wealth advance;
Nor station high, though in some favouring hour
The sons of learning may arrive at power;
Nor is it glory, though the public voice
Of honest praise will make the heart rejoice;
But ’t is the mind’s own feelings give the joy,—
Pleasures she gathers in her own employ.”

CRABBE; *The Borough*, Letter xxiv.

PLEASURES OF LITERATURE

I

THE DESIGN AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS DISCOURSE

I DO not propose to speak of Literature in the widest sense, as including everything that requires invention, judgment, or industry, but only in its decorative character. For, as out of three primitive colours the pencil creates nine, and tints and shades innumerable, so from the elements of poetry, eloquence, and philosophy, the variegated graces of the divine, the historian, and the novelist are composed. Bacon referred the three parts of learning to the corresponding qualities of the intellect: history to the memory, poetry to the imagination, and philosophy to the

reason. My subject is the ornamental in knowledge. But since the criterion of usefulness is found in the result, whatever is beautiful is also profitable. The pictures of Raffaele teach virtue, and a sermon of Taylor is more binding than an act of Parliament.

A discourse upon literature is like a landscape seen from a hill. Only here and there may we hope to catch a glimpse of the great river of learning, "whose head, being far in the land, is, at first rising, little and easily viewed; but still, as you go, it gapeth with a wider bank—not without pleasure and delightful winding—while it is on both sides set with trees and the beauty of various flowers; but still, the farther you follow it, the deeper and the broader it is, till, at last, it enwaves itself in the unfathomed ocean." We shall have clearer impressions of what we see, in proportion as our gaze is patient and our objects are few.

Science is not embraced in the pleasures of literature. Refined readers and noble authors are made without it. Ingenuity has endeavoured to show its healthful influence on the inventive faculty; and a biographer of Tasso traces his lucid method to this harsher erudition, and the intri-

cacy of Spenser to the neglect of it. Virgil and Milton are called as witnesses for the argument; but he who sees the symmetry of the *Æneid* in the geometry of the author, could account for the rural sweetness of the *Elegy* by the botany of Gray. Genius finds its own road, and carries its own lamp. The fourth proposition of Euclid troubled Alfieri for several years, yet he could construct a story, and reason in verse. Fleury might question the usefulness of logic, when he observed so many people arguing well who did not know it, and badly who did.

Mathematical studies have one leading defect: they engage the understanding without nourishing it, and often resemble an elaborate mechanism to convey water, without a spring or a reservoir to feed the pipes. In moral impression they are powerless. Burnet puts this objection with force: "Learning chiefly in mathematical sciences can so swallow up one's thought as to possess it entirely for some time; but when that amusement is over, nature will return, and be where it was, being rather diverted than overcome by such speculations." These, among other reasons, induced Bossuet to banish science from theological studies, and Fénélon to turn from what he called

the diabolism of Euclid. We have the humiliating confession of a most famous English astronomer, to serve as a note for the poetical lamentation, that

“ Never yet did philosophic tube,
That brings the planets home into the eye
Of observation, and discovers—else
Not visible—His family of worlds,
Discover Him that rules them: such a veil
Hangs over mortal eyes, blind from the birth,
And dark in things divine.”

Cowper pursuing, with the eyes of devotion and love, the summer sun as it set over the village spire of Emberton, may have felt his heart swelling with a grander sense of the Creator's glory than has often quickened the pulse of all the watchers of the stars, from the Chaldeans to Herschel.

II

THE LONG LIFE OF BOOKS

THESE are two aspects under which we might regard language as a channel for communicating instruction and pleasure. One would be Speech. How astonishing it is to know that a man may stand in the crowd of learned or ignorant, thoughtful or reckless hearers—all the elements of reason and passion tumultuously tossed together—and knock at the door of each heart in succession! Think how this wonder has been wrought already. By Demosthenes waving the stormy democracy into a calm, from a sunny hillside; by Plato enchaining the souls of his disciples under the boughs of a dim plane tree; by Cicero in the stern silence of the Forum; by our own Sheridan in the chapel of St. Stephen. They knocked and entered; wandered through the bosoms of their hearers; threaded the dark labyrinths of feeling; aroused the fiercest passions in their lone concealment. They did more. In

every heart they erected a throne, and gave laws. The Athenian populace started up with one accord and one cry to march upon Philip; the Senate throbbed with indignation at Catiline; and the British Parliament was dissolved for a few hours, that it might recover from the wand of the enchanter.

But it is in the second manifestation of language that the most marvellous faculty resides: the written outlives and outdazzles the spoken word. The life of rhetoric perishes with the rhetorician; it darkens with his eye, stiffens with his hand, freezes with his tongue. The bows of eloquence are buried with the archers. Where is the splendid declamation of Bolingbroke? It has vanished like his own image from the grass-plots of Twickenham.

That intellect to which the printing-press gives a body, an unquenchable spirit inhabits. Literature is the immortality of speech. It embalms for all ages the departed kings of learning, and watches over their repose in the eternal pyramids of fame. The sumptuous cities which have lighted the world since the beginning of time are now beheld only in the pictures of the historian or the poet. Homer rebuilds Troy, and Thucydides

renews the war of Peloponnesus. The dart that pierced the Persian breastplate moulders in the dust of Marathon; but the arrow of Pindar quivers, at this hour, with the life of his bow; like the discus of Hippomedon—

"Jamque procul meminit dextræ, servatque tenorem."

We look with grateful eyes upon this preservative power of literature. When the Gothic night descended over Europe, Virgil and Livy were nearly forgotten and unknown; but far away, in lone corners of the earth, amid silence and shadow, the ritual of genius continued to be solemnised: without were barbarism, storm, and darkness; within, light, fragrance, and music. So the sacred fire of learning burned upon its scattered shrines, until torch after torch carried the flame over the world.

One of the Spanish romancers shows Cydippe contemplating herself in a glass, and the power of Venus making the reflection permanent. The fable has a new and a pleasanter reading in the history of literature. A book becomes a mirror, with the author's face upon it. Talent only gives an imperfect image—the broken glimmer of a countenance. But the features of Genius remain unruffled. Time guards the shadow. Beauty,

the spiritual Venus—whose children are the Tassos, the Spensers, the Bacons—breathes the magic of her love, and fixes the face for ever.

These glasses of fancy, eloquence, or wisdom, possess a strange power. Illuminated by the sun of fame, they throw rays on watchful and reverent admirers. The beholder carries away some of the gilding lustre. And thus it happens that the light of genius never dies, but sheds itself over other faces in different hues of splendour. Homer shines in the softened beauty of Virgil, and Spenser revives in the decorated learning of Gray.

Art has been less happy in its self-protection. Look at Correggio's *Notte* where the light breaks from the Heavenly Child. Towards the close of the last century, a director of the Dresden Gallery removed the *toning*, and deprived the picture of one of its fairest charms. Fifty years ago, observers complained that the colour was gone from the *Cornaro Family* of Titian. The Helen of Homer and the Faëry Queen of Spenser are safe from such a catastrophe. Lalage has not lost a dimple. The tears still glisten in the eyes of Erminia. The coarsest rubbings of critical pens, or the harsher resolvents of digamma and

allegory, have left the features, and even the bloom of expression, unimpaired.

The poem, or the history, is also, for the most part, guarded from the restorer. Lord Orford told Gilpin that the great Vandyck at Wilton had been retouched by an inferior pencil, to which some of its discord of colours may be attributed. Dryden constructed a graceful allegory of Time, leaning over the work of a great master, with that ready pencil and ripening hand which

“Mellow the colours and imbrown the tint.”

But Pope wrote the true story of art when he said, with the exquisite taste and feeling with which he always spoke of painters, as Milton of music, and Thomson of scenery:

“So when the faithful pencil has designed
Some bright idea of the master's mind,
When a new world leaps out at his command
And ready nature waits upon his hand;
When the ripe colours soften and unite,
And sweetly melt into just shade and light;
When mellowing years their full perfection give,
And each bold figure just begins to live,
The treacherous colours the fair art betray,
And all the bright creation fades away.”

It is not pretended that the genius of the pen is

safe from all casualties that beset his brother of the pencil. I have not forgotten Hume's letter to Robertson about the gentleman who, sending for a pound of raisins, received them wrapped up in the doctor's highly drawn character of Queen Elizabeth. Literature has its complaint as well as its pæan. The splendid libraries of Rome are consumed by fire, and the unknown treasures of Greece perish in the sack of Constantinople. Still the poet and the historian maintain their supremacy over the artist and the sculptor. A mob shatters into dust that statue of Minerva whose limbs seemed to breathe under the flowing robe, and her lips to move; but the fierceness of the Goth, the ignorance of the Crusader, and the frenzy of the polemic, have not destroyed nor mutilated Penelope and Electra. Apelles dies; Æschylus lives. And if we have lost Phidias, Homer gives us a Jupiter in gold.

III

CLASSICAL STUDIES: THEIR ASSOCIATIONS AND INTEREST

COWPER said:

“Books are not seldom talismans and spells.”

This charm dwells especially in Greek and Latin writers. Much of it is owing to the season when they are put into our hands. Life is a garden of romance, and every day

“An idyll with Boccaccio’s spirit warm.”

Our eyes lend their brightness to the things they look upon. The book is endeared by the friends and the pleasure it recalls. This feeling of remembrance often dims the eye of riper manhood, as it recognises the worn-out school Horace, with its familiar marks. Silent lips and cold hands seem again to welcome and clasp us:

“Up springs at every step, to claim a tear,
Some little friendship formed and cherished here;
And not the lightest leaf but trembling teems
With golden visions and romantic dreams.”

Association is the delight of the heart, not less than of poetry. Alison observes that an autumn sunset, with its crimson clouds, glimmering trunks of trees, and wavering tints upon the grass, seems scarcely capable of embellishment. But if in this calm and beautiful glow the chime of a distant bell steal over the fields, the bosom heaves with the sensation that Dante so tenderly describes. The pensive joy of the student is awakened in the same manner. The clock of time, measuring the hours of life's departing day, strikes mournfully over the landscape of years. He remembers whom and what he has lost.

Even without this sympathy of association, classic story and fancy have a livelier interest than modern; they are shaded by the twilight into which they are withdrawn. Delille indicated the defect of the *Henriade* by saying that it was too near to the eye and the age. It has been suggested that Milton might have thrown his angelic warfare into remoter perspective. The fame of a battlefield grows with years. Napoleon storming the bridge of Lodi, and Wellington surveying the towers of Salamanca, affect us with fainter emotions than Brutus reading in his tent at Philippi, or Richard bearing down with the English chiv-

alry upon the white armies of Saladin. Nelson leading the line of warships against Copenhagen is less picturesque than Drake crowding his canvas after the galleons of Spain. One fleet lies under our eye; the other is enveloped in mist, and,

“ far off at sea descried,
Hangs in the clouds.”

As we grow older, the poet and the historian of our boyhood and youth become dearer. The thyme of Theocritus is wafted over the memory with a refreshing perfume. By a sort of natural magic, we raise the ghost of each intellectual pleasure, and make it appear without any dependence upon climate or time. The mind's theatre is lighted for the pageant of old learning to march through it, with all its pomp and music. The nightingale of Colonos enjoys a perpetual May in Sophocles. Pindar beguiles the loneliness of Cowley; while Horace lulls asleep the cares of Sanderson, and the domestic miseries of Hooker.

Unlike science, literature is not inductive. Its secrets are never discovered by scholars, tracking obscure hints which nature, or their ancestors, had dropped. A basket, left on the ground and overgrown by acanthus, suggests the Corinthian cap-

ital; the contemplation of the sun's rays along a wall produces the achromatic telescope; the movements of a frog reveal the wonders of galvanism; and an idle boy shows the way to perfect the steam-engine. Nothing of this kind has happened in literature. The Egyptian lake, in which some eyes see the source of the old Greek streams, ever melts into bluer distance, like the water-mist of the desert. The epic begins with the *Iliad*. The curtain rises from the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus; Pitt borrows of Demosthenes; Robertson does not heighten the colours of Livy, nor Montesquieu outgaze the sagacity of Tacitus.

The Homeric poems are the pleasures of literature in an abridgment. They are the sap circulating through every leaf of the tree of knowledge, and shedding blossoms on the furthest bough. Homer, than dramatists more dramatic, was the founder of the theatre, and peopled the stage. The Greek tragedy is the epic recast; the narrative being broken into dialogue, and the poet disappearing in the chorus. All the gentler shapes of fancy, seen in the lyrical poetry of Greece, were only flowers growing round his massive trunk, and sheltered by the majesty of his shade.

Nor in verse alone was his presence perceived and felt. See, in the wide-flowing stream of Plato's philosophy, the rich fruits of the poet's imagination, pouring down into the transparent depths the reflected shadows of their beauty. The ear catches the epic tune in the simpler melodies of Herodotus. It is easy to tell why Arnold's eyes are filled with tears at the story of Cleobis and Biton, rewarded for their filial piety by falling asleep in the temple, and dying together; and why he sat by the bed of his dying sister, translating whole books into the quainter English of old chronicles.

The same undercurrent of song sometimes freshens the dry track of Aristotle's severe inquiries, and betrays its hidden course by unexpected flushes of verdure and bloom over the hard surface. Himself the subject of all criticism, he let down from his heaven of starry thoughts the scales in which his own genius was to be weighed. And whosoever, in this calm weather of refinement and civilisation, sets out upon a voyage of poetical discovery, or pleasure, is

"Led by the light of the Mæonian star."

If we turn to romance, we see its green world

of beauty, pathos, and wisdom, rising from the fruitful waves of the Homeric inundation. Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses, present outlines of every hero who has won admiration, or drawn tears. The two former embody, in outward grace and vigour, the dreams, the enterprise, and the affections of bright and passionate manhood; the latter is a type of the tried spirit, educated and ennobled by difficulties endured and overcome.

Let Homer signify "a faithful witness"; and who, in portraying the glory, or the shame, of the manly or the womanly heart, is more eloquent or true? The *Odyssey* is a circulating library in one volume. All lights and shades of fiction chase each other along the page. The border story, the exploits of chivalry, the fairy legend, the solemn allegory, the picture of manners, the laughter-moving sketch—each drops, in turn, from the mysterious lips of the Asiatic Shakespeare. A thousand costly morals are treasured in Telemachus conducted by Mentor. What countless Ladies of Shalott have descended from Calypso, who, in her lonely island of the purple sea,

"Busied with the loom, and plying fast
Her golden shuttle, with melodious voice
Sat chaunting there."

The Homeric characters live and walk among us. Thersites grumbles and sneers; Ulysses constantly finds his way home, as the fortunate adventurer; and Penelope has been reappearing, for the last two centuries, in the deserted or the tempted wife.

The key of the supernatural, which in later times unlocked the haunted chambers of Udolpho, was certainly held by him who caused Mount Ida, the Greek fleet, and the Trojan city to tremble all over as the gods came down into battle. And not very obscurely may be seen rising over the epic mist the battlements of that castle which, as we learn from Gray, made Cambridge men "in general afraid to go to bed o' nights." The ghost of Alphonso, growing every moment gigantic in the moonlight, is not conceived with so fearful a sweep of Gothic magnificence as the enormous stride of Achilles in the world of spirits, when he heard that the son was worthy of the father. The poet's Hades had mightier and stranger inhabitants than Otranto. Even the school of horrors may date its beginning from the cave of Polyphemus, when the spear of olive wood hissed in the flaming socket of his lost eye. Reckon up the enchantments of Circe; the escape

from the Sirens; affection in humble life, as exhibited by Eümæus; the retributive frenzy sent upon the suitors of Penelope, and the bending of the wonderful bow. Call to mind those delicious scenes from nature, which make the reading of his verses to be like opening a window into a garden, when the south wind fans the roses up the wall; think over his noble sentiments, and his lessons of wisdom, generosity, and patience; compare his poetical fire—swallowing everything base in its mighty rush—with the mild lustre of Virgil, the artificial glow of Milton, or the accidental flames of Shakespeare; and confess that Homer is not only the poet, but the historian, the philosopher, the painter, the critic, and the romancer of the world.

IV

MENTAL DELIGHTS OF EARLY LIFE

THERE is one pleasure of literature that fades almost as quickly as it blooms. I mean the intensity of belief in what we read; when, turning our mind adrift upon a story, we glide, according to its will, beside overhanging gardens, or twilight depths of trees, until, floated beyond the colours and sounds of common life, we find ourselves under

“ Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn.”

Dugald Stewart thought that his relish for tales of wonder was not less lively in the decline of his life than it had been in the beginning; and he did not value the amusement which they afforded him the less because his reason taught him to regard them as vehicles of entertainment, not as articles of faith. His explanation refutes itself. The sense of reality gives the charm. Introduce

judgment, and the spell is broken. The undoubting mind, which Collins bestowed upon Tasso, is the characteristic only of the great poet, or the youngest reader. Romance is the truth of imagination and boyhood. Homer's horses clear the world with a bound. The child's eye needs no horizon to its prospect. An Oriental tale is not too vast. Pearls dropping from trees are only falling leaves in autumn. The palace that grew up in a night merely awakens a wish to live in it. The impossibilities of fifty years are the common-places of five.

What philosopher of the schoolroom, with the mental dowry of four summers, ever questions the power of the wand that opened the dark eyes of the beautiful princess, or subtracts a single inch from the stride of seven leagues? The Giant-killer with the familiar name has the boy's whole heart. And if Johnson in anger put down a little girl from his knee who had never read *Pilgrim's Progress*, what a frown would he have cast upon her whose tears of joy do not trickle over the *Glass Slipper*! Burke expresses the sentiments of many hearts: "I despair of ever receiving the same degree of pleasure from the most exalted performances of genius which I felt at that age

from pieces which my present judgment regards as trifling and contemptible."

The first and the last days of life have, indeed, one sentiment in common. A book interests in proportion as it surprises us. When a friend entered the library of Gray, he found him absorbed in the newspaper. It contained the opening letter of Junius. That venomous glitter of eye had the fascination of a discovery. Boccaccio, climbing by a ladder to the grass-grown loft of a monastery, to disinter a classic fragment from the dusty parchments, and Petrarch feasting his eyes on a Quinctilian—just brought into daylight—exhibit the sentiment in a more agreeable shape. The remark applies with equal truth to scenery, or remains of antiquity: whether Raffaele lingers over the outline of a Greek head upon a medal, or Poussin recognises some faintly defined feature of a leaf, by which he may give its portrait with all the accuracy of a botanist. In each case the key to the delight is to be found in the surprise; and the boy and the sage read a book by the same light. But, however lively may be the enjoyment of taste unexpectedly gratified, it is weak in comparison with that vivid sense of happiness and wonder which quickens the pulse

and brightens the eye of intelligent childhood. The feeling is unconsciously expressed by the poet who spoke of his own rapture and amazement on first looking into Chapman's Homer:

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortes when, with eagle eyes,
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent upon a peak in Darien."

The reader is surrounded by a new creation. The poem and the tale in youth are like Adam's early walk in the Garden. In the beautiful words of Burke, "The senses are unworn and tender, and the whole frame is awake in every part." The dew lies upon the grass. No smoke of busy life has darkened or stained the morning of our day. The pure air breathes about us. If any mist happen to rise, the sunbeam of hope catches and paints it. The cloudy weather melts in beauty, and the brightest smiles of the earth are born of its tears.

A first book has some of the sweetness of a first love. The music of the soul passes into it. The unspotted eye illuminates it. Defects are unobserved, and sometimes grow even pleasing from

their connection with an object that is dear; like the oblique eye in the girl to whom Descartes was attached. Later surprises will amuse, and deeper sympathies may cheer us up, but the charm loses its freshness, and the tenderness some of the balm.

Perhaps the loving admiration of Virgil, in what are called the dark times of literature, is to be explained on this principle. The dawn of civilisation is the childhood of a people. The *Æneid* was the fairy tale and Virgil was the enchanter of the Middle Ages. The revival of learning gave to it all the sparkle of surprise. A costly book was the home of a magician. It cast rays from every page, as from a window. A scholar, emerging from mediæval ignorance, and coming suddenly upon one of these illuminated palaces of fancy, was like a wayfarer, whose dismal road of snow and tempest brought him in the evening, full of joy and reverence, to the gate of a lighted abbey.

V

TASTE, ITS NATURE AND CHARMS

LITERATURE has two eyes—Taste and Criticism. Without these the book is cold and dark as the greenest landscape to a man that is blind. The best definition of taste was given by the earliest editor of Spenser who proved himself to possess any, when he called it a kind of *extempore judgment*. Burke's view was not dissimilar. He explained it to be an instinct which immediately awakes the emotion of pleasure, or dislike. Akenside is clear, as he is poetical, in his reply to the question:

“What, then, is Taste but these internal powers
Active, and strong, and feelingly alive
To each fine impulse? a discerning sense
Of decent and sublime, with quick disgust
From things deformed, or disarranged, or gross
In species? This nor gems, nor stores of gold,
Nor purple state, nor culture, can bestow,
But God alone, when first His active hand
Imprints the secret bias of the soul.”

We may consider taste, therefore, to be a settled habit of discerning faults and excellences in a moment—the mind's independent expression of approval or aversion. It is that faculty by which we discover and enjoy the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime, in literature, art, and nature; which recognises a noble thought, as a virtuous mind welcomes a pure sentiment, by an involuntary glow of satisfaction. But, while the principle of perception is inherent in the soul, it requires a certain amount of knowledge to draw out and direct it. The uttermost ignorance has no curiosity. Captain Cook met with some savages who entirely disregarded his ship—the first they had ever seen—as it sailed by them.

Taste is not stationary. It grows every day, and is improved by cultivation, as a good temper is refined by religion. In its most advanced state it takes the title of judgment. Hume quotes Fontenelle's ingenious distinction between the common watch that tells the hours and the delicately constructed watch that marks the seconds and smallest differences of time.

A taste enriched by observation and learning, sensitive to the most delicate tremble of the bal-

ance, is one of the choicest endowments of the understanding. It enjoys some of the humbler qualities of invention. It brings a dim meaning into light, and not only beholds the image, or the argument, but gazes beyond them into the rudiments of their creation; identifying itself with the author—seeing what he saw, and feeling what he felt. It enters readily into the reply of Paul Veronese to a person who asked him why some figures appeared in shade: “A cloud is passing over the sky, and darkens the picture.” Another example will show this power of taste still more clearly. In Raffaello’s *Burning of Borgo Vecchio* the dresses of the people who carry water toss in the wind; an ordinary observer perceives nothing in the circumstance, but a finer sight learns from it that the conflagration is rising with the gale, and that the flames will conquer.

These forward, inward, and backward looks are the motion and life of taste. When that eye of the intellect is closed, or injured, the majesty of genius is obscured, or broken. Men of brightest thoughts, walking abroad in their books, are unknown by the crowd. The muse who inspired them conceals, with a thick mist, their shape and features from the rude stare of the by-standers—

as the Olympian Lady enveloped the Trojans in the palace of Dido—to dawn upon the friendly and purified eyes of reflective taste, in the fresh bloom of beauty, and in the perfect gracefulness of form.

Molière might read a comedy to his old servant, and alter it according to the effect which it produced upon her, but her opinion could be useful only in sketches of manners, or descriptions of natural feelings. Suppose that the grandest pictures of Dante, or Æschylus, had been exhibited, and her decision on their comparative merits desired; the poet would have been a judge leaving his court to consult the crier on a question of law. There is a familiar story of a Scottish nobleman finding one of his shepherds in a field poring over *Paradise Lost*, and asking him what book he was reading—"Please your lordship," was the answer, "this is a very odd sort of an author; he would fain rhyme, but cannot get at it." The shepherd could have understood Allan Ramsay; Milton was out of his reach.

But not even to its own kindred has genius been always revealed. Horace censured Plautus. The library of Petrarch wanted the *Divine Comedy*, until Boccaccio sent it embellished with gold.

Daniel, a contemporary of Spenser, and a versifier of much elegance, ridiculed the antique English of the *Faëry Queen*. Walpole sneered at Thomson, and Gray could satisfy himself with admitting the *Castle of Indolence* to contain "some good stanzas." Hurd regretted that Milton had not written of angels in rhyme; Shenstone thought that Spenser might be enjoyed in a humorous light. Blackmore was the Homer of Locke. The critics of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, with Voiture at their head, predicted the failure of Corneille; and Patru, quite a leader of fashion in books, dissuaded Fontaine from writing fables.

Jealousy often explains blindness. When Le Brun heard of the death of Le Sueur, he said that he felt as if a thorn had just been taken out of his foot. Bellino warns Titian that he will never succeed in painting; and Titian, crowned with fame, scowls upon the dawning honours of Tintoretto. Pordenone, at Venice, kept a shield and a dagger by his side. Not seldom the theologian, the poet, and the man of letters display the same temper. Bossuet condemns the *Telemachus* of Fénelon; Corneille doubts the dramatic powers of Racine; and Voltaire smiles condescendingly at the humour of Le Sage.

VI

TASTE, AN INHERITANCE AND A FASHION

TASTE has an imaginary existence, unconnected with the intellect. It is often hereditary or acquired, and descends from father to son with his prejudices and estate. The manor-house, the hounds, and Somerville go together. Certain authors are adopted into families. Bunyan has the sacredness of a legacy; the songs of Watts are bound up with earliest days at mothers' knees; and Gray's *Elegy* encloses a domestic interior of warmth and affection in every stanza. Hymns have been intoned through the noses of three generations, and will probably delight the coming age with all the music and endearment of their ancestral twang. In such cases the heart, not the understanding, is the source of interest, and admiration is only a pleasure of memory.

Taste is sometimes one of the aspects of fashion. Folly borrows its mask, and walks out with

Wisdom arm-in-arm. Like virtues of greater dignity, it is assumed. The furniture and decorations of a room are arranged to indicate the serious and graceful sentiments of the occupant. Bishop Sanderson looks gravely on Petrarch through his carved frame. Boccaccio sparkles over a grim treatise of Calvin, and a ruffle is smoothed in Aquinas.

Addison sketched a student of this order, in whose library he found Locke *On the Understanding* with a paper of patches among the leaves, and all the classic authors—in wood, with bright backs. To such readers, a new book, of which people talk, is like a new costume which a person of celebrity has introduced. It is the rage. Not to be acquainted with it is to be ill-dressed. The pleasure is not of literature, but of vanity. The pretended taste is a polite fraud of society.

When a fashion of this kind happens to spread, it takes the character of a disease, raging and vanishing with the virulence and speed of an epidemic. Marino in Italy, Gongora in Spain, and Cowley in England are varieties of the same type. Butler, sitting with his chaplain, as his habit was, in a deep reverie, suddenly started up, with the exclamation, "Surely whole bodies of men some-

times lose their wits as instantaneously as an individual does!" The bishop's conjecture might very well illustrate the breaking out of a popular fever in things concerning taste. Like other attacks of delirium, it is unmanageable while it lasts. Its will is absolute. Reynolds assured Northcote that in the beginning of his own career the fame of Kneller was so universal, that a connoisseur presuming to suggest a competitor in Vandyck would have been laughed to scorn. Spence's criticism on the *Odyssey* was pronounced by persons of reputation to be superior to Addison's papers on Milton. It is pleasant to know that sooner or later the fever departs, and taste recovers the tone of health. Sixty years ago we met with Rasselas, Telemachus, Cyrus, and Marcus Flaminius, moving as equals in fortune and rank. The authors had passed their examination for honours, and were sent before the world in brackets. Time has changed their places in the calendar. Johnson and Fénelon are household words; but who speaks of Sir Charles Ramsay, or Cornelia Knight?

Two other peculiarities may be noticed in the natural history of taste. The first is the strong propensity in most people to make themselves

and their view the measure of excellence. The scenical De Staël, always on the watch for a stage effect, complained that Spenser was the most tedious writer in the world. Nor is the error confined to individuals. It is national. A country grows its taste like its fruit. Germany and romance inspire Schlegel; England and good sense rule Hallam. Read and contrast these two characters of a famous tragedy. "Why," asks Schlegel, "does the Romeo of Shakespeare stand so far above all the other dramas of that poet, except that, in the first delightful gush of youthful passion, he deemed that work a fitting shrine for the outpouring of his emotion, with which the entire poem thus became filled and interpenetrated?" "It may be said," observes Hallam, "that few, if any, of his plays are more open to reasonable censure: and we are almost equally struck by its excellences and its defects. The love of Romeo is that of the most bombastic commonplace of gallantry, and the young lady differs only in being one degree more mad." Were two voices ever heard more contrary, or positive?

The second peculiarity resides in what may be characterised as the taste of the market. In an age of high civilisation, a publisher is a manu-

facturer. He supplies the demand, but rarely creates it. Helvetius has an amusing story of a person appearing before a tribunal and describing himself as a maker of books. The judge pleaded ignorance of his productions. "I quite believe you," answered the author, with tranquillity; "I write nothing for Paris. When my book is printed I send the edition to America. I only compose for the colonies." He who addresses his own century, and flatters its caprices, will probably be as unknown in the next as the scribbler for remote countries was in Paris.

VII

A PURE TASTE SELDOM FOUND

SHENSTONE said that if the world were divided into one hundred parts, persons of original taste, educated by art, would only form a twentieth portion of the whole. Popular opinion is the old fable of the lion's great supper. The delicacies of the forest were spread before the guests; but the swine asked, "Have you no grains?" The most unpleasing shape of bad taste is a flippant confidence, with a strong show of appreciation. An entertaining French writer relates an experiment which he made upon the musical feelings of animals. The spectator altogether unmoved was the one with the most ear. He munched his thistles, and took no notice at all.

Dryden was certain, if Virgil and Martial had stood for a county, that the epigrammatist would have carried the election; but he consoled himself by reflecting that in matters of taste the applause of the mob is altogether worthless, and that, not

having lands of two pounds per annum in Parnassus, they are not privileged to poll.

Johnson enumerated three classes of literary judges—(1) those who give their opinion from impulse and feeling; (2) those who measure a line or a paragraph by rules alone; (3) and those who, being familiar with the laws of composition, and skilful in applying them, are independent of all. He advised an author to try and satisfy the third class, to esteem the first, but to despise and reject the second. His judgment is upheld by distinguished authorities. "Whoever writes or acts by system," is a remark of Payne Knight, "may stand a chance of being uniformly and invariably wrong." That which pleases a refined and a reflective reader must be good, although the artillery of criticism be played upon it. The falling tear blots out Aristotle.

The most philosophical critic of the eighteenth century perceived that graceful and imaginative composition should be esteemed chiefly by its impression upon the cultivated mind. Shaftesbury recommended an author to assemble the best forces of his wit, in order to make an assault on the territories of the heart. Reynolds spoke of taste as depending on those finer emotions

which make the organisation of the soul. Nor is a remark of Alison undeserving of remembrance—that the exercise of criticism always destroys for a time our sensibility to beauty, by leading us to regard the work in relation to certain laws of construction. The eye turns from the charms of nature to fix itself upon the servile dexterity of art.

The unconscious testimony of Gray may be added. When he sent his *Ode on the Progress of Poetry* to Dr. Warton, he requested him not to show it to mere scholars, who could scan the measures of Pindar, and say the *Scholia* by heart.

Literature is a garden, books are particular views of it, and readers are visitors. Much of their pleasure depends on the guides. It is very important to obtain the assistance of those only who are familiar with the beauties they show, and able, from feeling and practice, to appreciate lights and shades and colours. Of this small band Gilpin is a remarkable instance. How happily he clears a passage in the *Iliad* which learning had left in obscurity.

Homer distinguishes Jupiter by a peculiarity of forehead; Gilpin shows us that the poet intended to portray the projecting brow, which

casts a broad shadow over the eye. His interpretation is extremely picturesque, and may be compared with Spenser's description of the dragon:

“ But far within, as in a hollow glade,
Those glowing lamps were set, that made a dreadful shade.”

Here is another example. Virgil paints a ship in full sail, and losing sight of the line of coast,

“ Protinus aërias Phæacum abscondimus arces.”

In the eye of scholastic readers, “aërial” is only a synonym for “tall.” But a receding object does not suggest merely elevation. Taste again holds up its lamp. Gilpin conjectures that Virgil, who above all poets enjoyed the artistic eye, intended to indicate colour rather than shape, and represented the towers bathed in that soft blue of distance which gives the faint azure tinge to mountain scenery.

This delicacy of discrimination communicates a charm to the *Essays* of Uvedale Price, which will do more to form a true feeling for the beautiful than any single book in the English language. Twining is a younger member of the same family. One specimen of his manner will be interesting. Speaking of sounds, and the opportunities which

they afford of descriptive imitation, he refers to Milton's "curfew,"

" Over some wide-watered shore,
Swinging slow with sullen roar,"

and teaches us not to consider "swinging" as expressing only the motion of the bell, but to feel that its swing is actually heard in its tone, "which is different from what it would be if the same bell were struck with the same force, but at rest."

The elegance of Gilpin, the graceful knowledge of Price, the sensibility of Twining, and the poetical refinement of the Wartons are exceptions among commentators. A correction, or a note, is too often out of harmony with the passage explained or amended. A verse of Shakespeare becomes dreary in a moment. The sun goes in when Maratti retouches the picture of Titian.

It may be regretted that a large capacity and a vigorous imagination are so seldom accompanied by taste. The tender blossom of fancy was crushed in the hard pressure of Warburton. He has become his own accuser in the annotation upon these two lines of Shakespeare:

" And cuckow-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight "--

a description so rural and easy, that we might have expected it to escape even the predatory pen of a commentator. Hear Warburton: "I would read thus—'*Do paint the meadows much bedight,*' *i. e., much bedecked and adorned,* as they are in spring-time." Yet, if they are much bedight already, they do not require to be painted. The image has two sides. One looks to the eye; the other to the feelings. The emotional appeal is the more affecting. But Warburton runs his pen through it, forgetting how that tuneful friend, whom he delighted to honour, had lashed the conjecturing tribe

" Whose unwearied pains
Made Horace dull, and humbled Maro's strains."

The lovers of Shakespeare hope that the last revision of his works is inflicted. His poetry has been too long the orchard of quarrelsome editors, who leave disastrous proofs of their activity in trunks stripped of ivy, shattered boughs, and trampled enclosures. Some squalid article of intellectual dress, which they call an emendation, sticking among the rich fruit, proclaims the plunderer to have been up in the tree. It happens, indeed, that the sentiment of anger is occasionally

softened by a sense of the ridiculous. One adventurer has no sooner packed up his little bundle of pillage, than he is waylaid by a fierce rival on the opposite side. Then begin the clamour, the reproach, and the struggle. Pamphlets are hurled; satirical blows are showered:

"Collecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis."

The assertion of Bacon, that the most corrected copies of an author are commonly the least correct, may advantageously be stamped as an introductory motto for every copy of Shakespeare.

VIII

TASTE PUTS AN AUTHOR IN A FAVOURABLE LIGHT

A GOOD reader is nearly as rare as a good writer. People bring their prejudices, whether friendly or adverse. They are lamp and spectacles, lighting and magnifying the page. It was a pleasant sarcasm of Selden, that the alchemist discovered his art in Virgil's golden bough, and the optician his science in the Annals of Tacitus. When juries of Taste are thus empanelled, an author may fairly claim a right of challenge. Passion and self-love corrupt verdicts. What judge would Milton have been of Cowley's discourse upon Cromwell? Calvin, breathing flames and threats against Servetus, found a heresy in every line of his treatises. Trublet had a contemporary whose periods of contradiction came round in their order. To-day Corneille was despicable, to-morrow the prince of poets.

It is not enough for a reader to be unprejudiced. He should remember that a book is to be studied as a picture is hung. Not only must a bad light be avoided, but a good one be obtained. This Taste supplies. It puts a history, a tale, or a poem, in a just point of view, and there examines the execution. It causes the reader to forget himself and his own century. He goes out of the familiar into the heroic; rides with the *Cid*; laces the helmet of Surrey: and flings himself among the magnificent knights of Tasso. Every impulse of pleasure and grief makes his heart beat by turns. He braves the tempest with Lear, endures the picturesque torments of Dante, and sinks into delicious dreams in the *Castle of Indolence*. These are some of the delights of a poetical faith, which every accomplished reader encourages. On the stage a candle is the sun, and a painted cloth stands for Venice. The credulity of Taste gives the like help to the illusions of authors, and never sits down in the same temper to the wonders of Camoens, and the statistics of M'Culloch.

If an architect were to fix a ladder against a cathedral window on a dull November day, and break up with sharp scrutiny the crimson dress

and glory of the saint, the artist's powers would disappear. Colour and expression are gone. The maker of the window never contemplated such an ordeal.

He who disregards the object and the character of a book inflicts on its writer an equal wrong. Consider Spenser. He calls his *Faëry Queen* a perpetual allegory, or dark conceit. It should be read under the bright play of the moral, which is the sun to the window. In blaming the obscurity of the poem, we forget that its illumination is coloured. It is the lustre of a ruby, not a crystal. Each thought is tinged by the allegory into a hue of fancy, as the sun in the cathedral is dyed by the glass into stains of amethyst and emerald. The critic who decomposes a stanza into common-sense is the architect spelling out upon his ladder the wonders of the window, instead of gazing up to it from the dim choir, when summer or autumn lights bathe the faces and the drapery from behind.

No window gives all its splendours at once. It must be visited often. A morning or afternoon gleam sheds a different tincture. Moonlight wakes a solemn charm of its own. Winckelmann wished to live with a work of art as a friend. The

saying is true of Pen and Pencil. Fresh lustre shoots from *Lycidas* in a twentieth perusal. The portraits of Clarendon are mellowed by every year of reflection. The conjecture had only a poetical boldness, which supposed that a student might linger over Shakespeare, dwelling upon him line by line, and word by word, until the mind, steeped in brilliancy, would almost scatter light in the dark.

Whoever has spent many days in the company of choice pictures will remember the surprises that often reward him. When the sun strikes an evening scene by Both, or Berghem, in a particular direction, the change is swift and dazzling. Every touch of the pencil begins to live. Buried figures arise; purple robes look as if they had just been dyed; cattle start up from dusky corners; trunks of trees flicker with gold; leaves flutter in light; and a soft, shadowy gust—sun and breeze together—plays over the grass. But the charm is fleeting, as it is vivid. In a few minutes the sun sinks lower, or a cloud rolls over it; the scene melts, the figures grow dark, and the whole landscape faints and dies into coldness and gloom.

Life has its gay, hopeful hours which lend to the book a lustre, not less delightful than the ac-

cidents of sunshine breathe upon the picture. Every mind is sometimes dull. The magician of the morning may be the beggar of the afternoon. Now the sky of thought is black and cheerless; presently it will be painted with beauty, or spangled with stars. Taste varies with temper and health. There are minutes when the song of Fletcher is not sweeter than Pomfret's. The reader must watch for the sunbeam. Elia puts this difficulty in a pleasant form, and shows us that our sympathy with a writer is affected by the hour, or the mood in which we make his acquaintance: "In the five or six impatient minutes before the dinner is quite ready, who would think of taking up the *Faëry Queen* for a stopgap, or a volume of Bishop Andrewes's sermons? Milton almost requires a solemn service to be played before you enter upon him." Only a zealot in Political Economy begins Adam Smith before breakfast; and he must be fast growing benumbed in metaphysics who wishes Cudworth to come in with the dessert.

A celebrated author is reported to have said, "I know not how it is, but all my philosophy in which I was so warmly engaged in the morning, appears like nonsense as soon as I have dined."

Perhaps Ariosto selected an unpropitious hour when he presented his *Orlando* to the Cardinal d'Este, and was startled by the inquiry of his Eminence, Whence had he gathered such a heap of fooleries?

The man of taste, therefore, chooses his book, according to the season and his own disposition at the moment; waiting for the rays that occasionally dart from it, in some happy transparency and warmth of the mind, as the lover of pictures looks for the flush of sunset on the canvas. By degrees he comes to know that every writer makes a certain demand upon his reader. This is emphatically true of those inquiries or consolations which concern the soul. That ancient Master, who always rose from his knees to his pencil, suggests the tone of mind. The serenity of Wordsworth's grandest verse is not for him who receives a box of twenty new volumes every week; but for the serious, musing man who sits at his own door, and,

"like the pear,
That overhangs his head from the green wall,
Feeds in the sunshine."

IX

BOOKS WHICH ARE ADAPTED TO DIFFERENT SEASONS

JOHNSON at dinner sometimes kept a book in his lap, wrapped up in a corner of the tablecloth; and Hammond always took one of these mute friends to cheer his walks. Southey divided them into three classes: one for the table, a second for the fields, and a third for the coach. A closely printed volume, full of texts, which the mind worked into sermons, was the favourite for a journey. The *Colloquies* of Erasmus stood him "in good stead" for more than one excursion; and the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More was found serviceable for another.

A classification of authors to suit all hours and weathers might be amusing. Ariosto spans a wet afternoon like a rainbow. North winds and sleet agree with Junius. The visionary tombs of Dante glimmer into awful perspective by moonlight. Crabbe is never so pleasing as on the hot shingle,

when we can look up from his verses at the sleepy sea and count the

“Crimson weeds, which spreading flow,
Or lie like pictures on the sands below:
With all those bright red pebbles, that the sun
Through the small waves so softly shines upon.”

Some books come in with lamps, and curtains, and fresh logs. An evening in late autumn, when there is no moon, and the boughs toss like foam raking a pebbly shore, is just the time for *Undine*. A voyage is read with deepest interest in winter, while the hail dashes against the window:

“’Tis pleasant by the cheerful hearth to hear
Of tempests and the dangers of the deep,
And pause at times, and feel that we are safe;
And with an eager and suspended soul,
Woo terror to delight us.”

The sobs of the storm are musical chimes for a ghost story, or one of those fearful tales with which the blind fiddler in *Redgauntlet* made “the auld carlines shake on the settle, and the bits of bairns skirl on their minnies out frae their beds.”

Shakespeare is always most welcome at the chimney-corner: so is Goldsmith: who does not wish Dr. Primrose to call in the evening and

Olivia to preside at the urn? Elia affirms that there is no such thing as reading, or writing, but by a candle; he is confident that Milton composed the morning hymn of Eden with a clear fire burning in the room; and in Taylor's gorgeous description of sunrise he found the smell of the lamp quite overpowering. A modern poet has charmingly sketched a family group enjoying the evening pleasures of literature:

“ At night, when all assembling round the fire,
Closer and closer draw till they retire,
A tale is told of India or Japan,
Of merchants from Golcond or Astracan,
What time wild Nature revelled unrestrained,
And Sinbad voyaged, and the Caliphs reigned;—
Of Knight renowned from holy Palestine,
And Minstrels, such as swept the lyre divine,
When Blondel came, and Richard in his cell
Heard, as he lay, the song he knew so well;—
Of some Norwegian, while the icy gale
Rings in her shrouds, and beats her iron sail,
Among the shining Alps of Polar seas
Immovable—for ever there to freeze!
And now to Venice—to a bridge, a square,
Glittering with light—all nations masking there,
With light reflected on the tremulous tide,
Where gondolas in gay confusion glide,
Answering the jest, the song on every side.”

There are various ways of making, or finding, happiness. Lord Peterborough was happy when, jumping from his carriage, sword in hand, he drove a dainty player into the thickest mud of the Strand, and splashed him from the clock of the stocking to the top curl; Southey rejoiced in unpacking a box of books; and Selwyn in a fine view of the gibbet. But is any happiness like that of a dear old book by the fireside—Farrindon, with his grand seriousness, or romantic Henry More, with his far gaze into the life of angels?

Yet Elia carried his candlelight theory beyond due measure. Some people have tried "the affectation of a book at noonday in gardens and sultry arbours," without finding their task of love to be unlearned. Indeed, many books belong to sunshine, and should be read out of doors. Clover, violets, and roses breathe from their leaves; they are most lovable in cool lanes, along fieldpaths, or upon stiles overhung by hawthorn; while the blackbird pipes, and the nightingale bathes its brown feathers in the twilight copse. In such haunts it is soothing to wander with Thomson, Bloomfield, or Clare,

"till declining day,
Through the green trellis shoots a crimson ray."

The sensation is heightened when we read an author amid the scenery which he describes; as Barrow studied the sermons of Chrysostom in his own See of Constantinople. What daisies sprinkle the walks of Cowper, if we take his *Task* for a companion through the lanes of Weston! Under the thick hedges of Horton, darkening either bank of the field in the September moonlight, *Il Penseroso* is still more tender. And whoever would feel at his heart the deep pathos of Collins's lamentation for Thomson, should murmur it to himself as he glides by the breezy lawns and elms of Richmond—

“ When Thames in summer wreaths is drest,
And oft suspend the dashing oar,
To bid his gentle spirit rest.”

X

DILIGENCE, THE HANDMAID OF TASTE

WHETHER a book be read from the oak lectern of a college library, in the parlour window, or beneath the trees of summer, no fruit will be gathered unless the thoughts are steadily given up to the perusal. Attention makes the genius; all learning, fancy, and science depend upon it. Newton traced back his discoveries to its unwearied employment. It builds bridges, opens new worlds, and heals diseases; without it taste is useless, and the beauties of literature are unobserved; as the rarest flowers bloom in vain, if the eye be not fixed upon the bed.

Condillac enforces this habit of patience by an apt similitude. He supposes a traveller to arrive in the dark at a castle, commanding large views of the surrounding scenery. If with sunrise the shutters be unclosed for a moment, and then fastened, he catches a glimpse of the landscape, but no object is clearly seen or remembered—all

wavers in a confusion of light and shade. But if the windows be kept open, the visitor receives and retains a strong impression of the woods, fields, and villages spread before his eyes.

The application of the comparison is obvious. Every noble book is a stronghold of the mind, built upon some high place of contemplation, and overlooking wide tracts of intellectual country. The unacquainted reader may be the traveller coming in the dark; sunrise will represent the dawn of his comprehension; and a drowsy indifference is explained by the closing of the windows. In whatever degree this languor of observation is broken, gleams will break in upon the mind. But the shutters must be fastened back. The judgment and the memory are required in their fulness to irradiate the subject, before the mental prospect stretching over the page can appear in its length, and breadth, and beauty.

Attention is not often the talent of early life. For this cause, the exquisite verses of Virgil, when read in schools, excite little, if any, interest and delight. It was remarked by a most accomplished person, the late Mr. Davison, that the *Principia* of Newton, or the doctrine of fluxions, may be understood by a youth of eighteen; but

that the *Iliad*, the *Epistles* of Horace, or the *History* of Clarendon, can never be embraced, until repeated efforts on the part of the reader himself shall have conducted him to that point of view in which the writers regarded their own works.

There is one variety of attention which the humblest student may acquire. Gassendi informs us that Peiresc always underlined any difficult passage, that he might return to it at a convenient season. Wyttenbach mentions the same practice in Ruhnken. Leibnitz made extracts, wrote his opinion upon them, and then cast the papers aside. Having engraved the picture on his memory he destroyed the plate. The advice of a scholar, whose piles of learning were set on fire by imagination, is never to be forgotten: Proportion an hour's reflection to an hour's reading, and so dispirit the book into the student. Nor is the following caution less happy than it is quaint: "Marshal thy notions into a handsome method. One will carry twice as much weight, trussed and packed up in bundles, than when it lies untoward, flapping and hanging about his shoulders."

Lamb prided himself on being able to read anything which in his heart he felt to be a book. He

had no antipathies. Shaftesbury was not too genteel nor Fielding too familiar. Pope confessed his own miscellaneous amusements in letters, knocking at any door, as the storm drove. Montaigne and Locke were alike to him. The example is dangerous. A discursive student is almost certain to fall into bad company. Homes of entertainment, scientific and romantic, are always open to a man who is trying to escape from his thoughts. But a shelter from the tempest is dearly bought in the house of the plague. Ten minutes with a French novel, or a German rationalist, have sent a reader away with a fever for life.

At the first glance, all study might seem to be wasted which is not devoted to the greatest writer in each particular branch of knowledge; but consideration shows the bold attempt to be vain. The exertion of mind is too much for its strength. A scholar of the average capacity reading an author of the sublimest, is a man of the common size going up a hill with a giant: every step is a strain; the easy walk of the one is the full speed of the other. Frequent intervals of rest are needed. He must come down from the high argument into the plain. Over a dozen pages of Bloomfield he

recovers from the fatigue of a morning's journey with Dante; and a sermon of Blair's gives him breath for another climb with Hooker. Dr. Warton had a friend who, after reading a book of the *Dunciad*, always soothed himself with a Canto of Spenser.

We may generalise Ben Jonson's advice to a poet about the choice of a master, to be honoured and followed until he grows very He. It is certainly better to set up one great light in a room, than to make it twinkle with a dozen tapers. Dante had his Virgil; Corneille, his Lucan; Barrow, his Chrysostom; Bossuet, his Homer; Chatham, his Demosthenes, in a translation; Gray, his Spenser. It is a remark of Warburton that Burke never wrote so well as when he imitated Bolingbroke. Tonson, the bookseller, seldom called upon Addison without finding Bayle's Dictionary on the table. And in our own times, Lamb assured Mr. Cary, that Coleridge fed himself on Collins. "I guess good housekeeping," was the saying of Fuller, "not by the number of chimneys, but by the smoke." Ben Johnson's exhortation, therefore, may be received, but only in a large and liberal spirit. Reverence is not to be debased into superstition. Choose an old field, and work

in it; but never sink into the serf of the proprietor. Be the lord, while you are the tiller, of the ground. Recollect the warning of Pliny, and bind a laurel upon the plough.

XI

CRITICISM, ITS CURIOSITIES AND RESEARCHES

CRITICISM is taste put into action. A true criticism is the elegant expression of a just judgment. It includes taste, of which it is the exponent and the supplement. The frame of genius, with its intricate construction and mysterious economy, is the subject of study. The finest nerve of sensation may not be overlooked. But criticism must never be sharpened into anatomy. The delicate veins of fancy may be traced, and the rich blood, that gives bloom and health to the complexion of thought, be resolved into its elements. Stop there. The life of the imagination, as of the body, disappears when we pursue it.

Many pleasures of literature are bound up in criticism. One interesting feature is seen in the ease with which it discovers what Addison called the specific quality of an author. In Livy, it will be the manner of telling the story; in Sallust, per-

sonal identification with the character; in Tacitus the analysis of the deed into its motive. If the same test be applied to painters, it will find the prominent faculty of Correggio to be manifested in harmony of effect; of Poussin, in the sentiment of his landscapes; and of Raffaele, in the general comprehension of his subject.

The popular characters of authors are frequently only vulgar errors. They are copies of portraits for which the poet or the historian never sat. We have an example in Pindar. During how many years has he been called the tumultuous, the ungovernable; as if his fiery and unbroken fancy, scorning the rein, continually ran away with his judgment. Yet Pindar is as methodical as Collins, or Gray. To borrow an illustration from his own races, he has his thoughts always in hand, and their fiercest plunges only carry the chariot nearer to the goal.

A single thread guides the critical eye through a labyrinth of character. It infers the lowly station, as it might prove the ancientness of Homer, from internal evidence. He tells us what a thing cost. Some pages of the *Iliad* are a priced catalogue. In the style of Virgil the intimation of rank is equally plain. He retreats from all con-

tact with poverty. In the herdsman's hut, or under a tree with a shepherd, he has the air of a person of quality, unbending into simplicity and bucolics. He receives a maple cup from a peasant with the grace of a courtier, who is thinking all the time upon the last *amphora* which Mæcenas opened.

The history of Crabbe offers a proof of this penetration. Lord Jeffrey had remarked of his similes that, ingenious and elaborate as they are, they seemed to be the thoughtful productions of a busy and watchful fancy, rather than the spontaneous growth of a heated imagination. The poet admitted the conjecture to be well founded: "Jeffrey is quite right; my usual method has been to think of such illustrations, and insert them after finishing a tale."

An agreeable function of Criticism is exercised in the recognition of a picture, or a book, by some distinctive expression which is ascertained to belong to a particular workman. A connoisseur lays his hand on Mieris without hesitation. He carries the catalogue in his eye down a gallery; spelling Rembrandt in shadows; while the deep purple of a distance prepares him for Poussin.

The most original genius has a favourite for-

mula. In Titian it is a crimson cap; in Tintoretto, the lowering face of a Moor; in Wouverman, a white horse; in Domenichino, an angel; in N. Berghem, a woman riding on an ass; in Hobbema, the dewy lustre of trees. Cuyp glows all over in a haze of warmth; and the little farce upon canvas discloses Jan Steen. Even amid the inexhaustible fruitfulness of Rubens, Reynolds recognised one smooth, flat face, continually recurring. Every "Madonna" of Raffaele is descended from the same type. The high, smooth, round forehead, with the thin hair, reappears in each change of posture and expression. The Dutch artist is the most striking instance of all. Under his hand, the river of Eden is a canal; and he builds Babylon upon piles.

Authors afford equal opportunities to critical discernment. A phrase, or an epithet in a book, is a particular hue, or shade, of a picture. It identifies the writer. We know a Chaucer, as we know a Van Eyck. St. Paul uses one word twenty-six times, and it occurs in no other part of the New Testament, except in the parable of the Barren Fig Tree. South is discovered immediately by the lash of a sentence, and Andrewes by the mechanism of his exposition. A costly Lat-

inism encircles the gold of Taylor; and the rising incense of devotion—sweeter than any odours of poetry—assures a reader that he is bending over a homily of Leighton.

Pope wished to have translated Homer in Asia, with present life to enlighten the past. In our days, he might have brought all Persia to his lawn. The printing-press has made criticism a citizen of every kingdom. It is naturalised in antiquity. It talks with Aristotle, and lives with Cuvier. Every harvest field of learning should be gleaned. No fragment of information is without a value. If a colour and a word establish the relationship of a picture and a book, a single fact in natural history may suffice to disprove it. Take a simple instance. The *Batrachomachia* was long circulated with the Homeric poems; but criticism is prepared to pronounce it spurious, from finding in it a reference to the cock. That bird is not mentioned in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, and is supposed to have been a stranger in Greece, until the soldiers of Alexander brought home the jungle-fowl of India, and domesticated it in Europe.

Criticism pursues with lively interest the winding and contrary paths, by which gifted men have

travelled to fame. Genius is the instinct of enterprise. A boy came to Mozart, wishing to compose something, and inquiring the way to begin. Mozart told him to wait. "You composed much earlier." "But asked nothing about it," replied the musician. M. Angelo is hindered in his childish studies of art; Raffaele grows up with pencil and colours for playthings: one neglects school to copy drawings, which he dared not bring home; the father of the other takes a journey to find his son a worthier teacher. M. Angelo forces his way; Raffaele is guided into it. But each looks for it with longing eyes. In some way or other, the man is tracked in the little footsteps of the child. Dryden marks the three steps of progress, as quoted by Disraeli:

"What the child *admired*,
The youth ENDEAVOURED, and the man ACQUIRED."

He was an example of his own theory. He read Polybius, with a notion of historic exactness, before he was ten years old. Witnesses rise over the whole field of learning. Pope, at twelve, feasted his eyes in the picture galleries of Spenser. Murillo filled the margin of his schoolbooks with drawings. Le Brun, in the beginning of child-

hood, drew with a piece of charcoal on the walls of the house. The young Ariosto quietly watched the fierce gestures of his father, forgetting his displeasure in the joy of copying from life, into a comedy which he was writing, the manner and speech of an old man enraged with his son.

Cowley, in the history of his own mind, shows the influence of boyish fancies upon later life. He compares them to letters cut in the bark of a young tree, which grow and widen with it. We are not surprised to hear from a schoolfellow of the Chancellor Somers that he was a weakly boy, who always had a book in his hand, and never looked up at the play of his companions; to learn from his affectionate biographer, that Hammond, at Eton, sought opportunities of stealing away to say his prayers; to read that Tournefort forsook his college class, that he might search for plants in the neighbouring fields; or that Smeaton, in petticoats, was discovered on the top of his father's barn, in the act of fixing the model of a windmill which he had constructed. These early traits of character are such as we expect to find in the cultivated lawyer, who turned the eyes of his age upon Milton; in the Christian, whose life was one varied strain of devout praise; in the

naturalist, who enriched science by his discoveries; and in the engineer, who built the Eddystone Lighthouse.

The instinct of enterprise is combined with the instinct of labour. Genius lights its own fire; but it is constantly collecting materials to keep alive the flame. When a new publication was suggested to Addison, after the completion of the *Guardian*, he answered, "I must now take some time, *pour me délasser*, and lay in fuel for a future work." The strongest blaze soon goes out when a man always blows and never feeds it. Johnson declined an introduction to a popular writer with the remark, that he did not desire to converse with a person who had written more than he had read.

It is interesting to follow great authors or painters in their careful training and accomplishing of the mind. The long morning of life is spent in making the weapons and the armour, which manhood and age are to polish and prove. Ussher, when only twenty years old, formed the daring resolution of reading all the Greek and Latin Fathers, and with the dawn of his thirty-ninth year he completed the task. Hammond, at Oxford, gave thirteen hours of the day to philosophy and classical literature, wrote commentaries on

all, and compiled indexes for his own use. Milton's youthful studies were the landscapes and the treasury of his blindness and want.

The sister art teaches the same lesson. Claude watched every colour of the skies, the trees, the grass, and the water. The younger Vandervelde transferred the atmospheric changes to large sheets of blue paper, which he took in the boat when he went, as he said in his Dutch-English, a "skoying" on the Thames. "I have neglected nothing," was the modest explanation which N. Poussin gave of his success.

With these calls to industry in our ears, we are not to be deaf to the deep saying of Lord Brooke, the friend of Sidney, that some men overbuild their nature with books. The motion of our thoughts is impeded by too heavy a burden; and the mind, like the body, is strengthened more by the warmth of exercise than of clothes. When Buffon and Hogarth pronounced genius to be nothing but labour and patience, they forgot history and themselves. The instinct must be in the mind, and the fire be ready to fall. Toil alone would not have produced the *Paradise Lost*, or the *Principia*. The born dwarf never grows to the middle size. Rousseau tells a story of a painter's

servant who resolved to be the rival or the conqueror of his master. He abandoned his livery to live by his pencil. But, instead of the Louvre, he stopped at a sign-post. Mere learning is only a compiler, and manages the pen as the compositor picks out the type—each sets up a book with the hand. Stone-masons collected the dome of St. Paul's, but Wren hung it in air.

Ease, when it has become constitutional, is called Grace. Until he had got this one tune by heart, Gibbon wrote slowly. The simpler periods of Goldsmith flowed with painful effort. "Everybody," was his own complaint, "wrote better, because he wrote faster than I." Cowper confesses that his pleasant *Task* was constructed with weariness and watching. Burke's gorgeous imagery had very little of that rush which is commonly heard in it. Addison wore out the patience of his printer; and Dr. Warton assures us that, when a whole impression of a *Spectator* was nearly worked off, he would frequently stop the press to insert a new preposition.

The authority of Pope seems to contradict the argument. He declared that what he wrote the quickest pleased him best, as the *Essay on Criticism*, the *Rape of the Lock*, and a large portion of

the *Iliad*. But the miracle melts as we look at it.

Of the first poem the materials were previously digested in prose; the Sylph-machinery was a supplement to the second; and the manuscript of the third may be consulted in our National Library. A truer portrait of the poet in his study will be found in his epistle to Jervas, where he reminds his friend of their meditative hours:

“ How oft in pleasing tasks we wear the day,
While summer suns roll unperceived away!
How oft our slowly growing works impart,
While images reflect from art to art.”

Speed in composition is a questionable advantage. History records two names which may represent the swift and the lingering pen—Lope de Vega and Milton. We see one pouring out verses more rapidly than a secretary could write them; the other building up, in the watches of the dark, a few majestic lines: one leaving his treasures to be easily compressed into a single volume; the other, to be spread abundantly over forty-six quartos: one gaining fifteen pounds; the other, a hundred thousand ducats: one sitting at the door of his house, when the sun shone, in a coarse coat of grey cloth, and visited only by ad-

miring strangers from foreign countries; the other followed by crowds whenever he appeared, while even the children shouted after him with delight.

It is only since the earth has fallen on both, that the fame and the honours of the Spaniard and the Englishman have been changed. He who nearly finished a comedy before breakfast, now lies motionless in his small niche of monumental biography; and he who, long choosing, began late, is walking up and down in his singing robes, and with the laurel round his head, in the cities of many lands; having his home and his welcome in every devout heart, and upon every learned tongue of the Christian world.

Of course, the frequent writer will, in time, be quick. The practised is the ready hand. Raffaele, who painted a head with such fine touches that it seems to have been finished by single hairs, could almost work as fast as Rembrandt, who laid on his colour with a palette-knife. Dryden's mastery of language and rhyme enabled him to remit to Tonson an instalment of seven thousand five hundred verses; Johnson, from the fullness of his mind, produced *Rasselas* in the evenings of one week; and Scott wrote the last two volumes of *Waverley* in twenty-six afternoons of summer.

Genius easily hews out its figure from the block; but the sleepless chisel gives it life. We have, in the practice of Titian, an interesting view of the steps by which excellence is won. He began a picture by striking off an outline in four pencilings; he then put it aside, sometimes allowing months to go by before he looked at it again; when he returned to his work, it was with the watchfulness of a rival. The last corrections were given by daily touches. Virgil composed verses in the same manner. He commenced a figure or a landscape in rough sketches. Rare drawings of a painter should we have found in his scattered notes. What studies did he make of that Carthaginian queen, before she rose from his poetry in the splendour of her charms. He produced a few lines in the morning, and spent days or months in shaping and adorning them. We see the artist rubbing in tints over the delicate surface of words:

“And Titian’s colour looks like Virgil’s art.”

Buffon has told us how patiently he moulded his loose sentences into symmetry. So often did he turn a paragraph in his mind and on his tongue—speaking it over and over until his ear was satis-

fied—that he was able to repeat whole pages of his works.

This transparency of diction is only found in productions of the strongest genius. A burning invention makes it. That exquisite material, through which we gaze on our woods and gardens, obtains its crystalline beauty after undergoing the processes of the furnace. It was melted by fire before the rough particles of sand disappeared, and the fibres of the leaf, or the streaks of the tulip, were discerned. Similar operations refine language. Imagination mingles the harsh elements of composition until each coarse, shapeless word is absorbed by the heat, and brightens slowly into that smooth and unclouded style, through which the slightest emotions of the heart, and the faintest colours of fancy, are reflected.

The theologian, the poet, the historian, or the philosopher, who has this lucidness of utterance, is certain of a wide and lasting reputation. It made Ariosto the Homer of Italy, and gathered all ranks and ages to his knees. Taste and science, love and beauty, hung upon his lips. He was the companion of the maiden and the scholar of a starry Galileo, and a knight in armour.

Whatever is pure is also simple. It does not

keep the eye on itself. The observer forgets the window in the landscape it displays. A fine style gives the view of Fancy—its figures, its trees, or its palaces—without a spot. But to a diseased eye, crystal is cold. Hence it happens that the lawful masters of language are sometimes deposed, for a season, by the daring of literary revolutionists. A barbaric uproar drowns the musical voices of Addison and his brethren. One idiom jangles another out of tune. In reading some modern authors, who have nothing of the tripod or the oracle, except the frenzy and the darkness, we are reminded of the pleasant correction which Ménage inserted in the *Délices d' Esprit* of a flighty Frenchman: “Au lieu de *Délices*, lisez *Délires*.”

The exhibition of real strength is never grotesque. Distortion is the agony of weakness. It is the dislocated mind whose movements are spasmodic. Pressure of thought may overburden sentences with meaning, as in the *Analogy* of Butler, or the rhymes of Cowley. Swift confessed to Pope that he had been obliged to read parts of the *Essay on Man* twice over. It was not obscure, but deep. The *Bard* of Gray and Collins's *Ode on the Poetical Character* seem dark; the former from its historical, the latter from its metaphysical,

allusions. Numerous passages of Milton are incomprehensible to a reader whose knowledge is not large in chivalry, romance, or classical legends. Take the magnificent description of Satan arming his legions, and feeling his heart swell with pride, as he gazes upon the myriads before him:

“ For never since created man
Met such embodied force, as named with these
Could merit more than that small infantry
Warr’d on by cranes; though all the giant brood
Of Phlegra with th’ heroic race were join’d
That fought at Thebes and Ilium, on each side
Mix’d with auxiliar gods; and what resounds
In fable or romance of Uther’s son,
Begirt with British and Armoric knights;
And all who since, baptised or infidel,
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Morocco, or Trebisonde,
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore,
When Charlemain, with all his peerage, fell
By Fontarabia.”

In such cases, notes, which are the dictionary of ignorance, will open the chambers of imagery to one who knocks: and when the sentiment, or the illustration, has been disengaged, it delights the eye of taste by its symmetry or grandeur. The *Divine Comedy* should have its handbook as

well as the Coliseum. The idioms of genius will always present obscurities to the uninformed; they are to be acquired, as a man learns to translate a dialect. When the reader is competent, genius is bright. We do not expect Waller to appreciate Milton. But, in general, he who understands himself is easily understood. Jortin said, "The man who is not intelligible, is not intelligent."

XII

CRITICISM ENFORCES UNITY OF PURPOSE

HE runs uncertainly who has two goals. The flight becomes a flutter; the race, a circle. Raffaelle might lay down his pencil to build a cathedral; and L. da Vinci fill a page with a problem and a caricature. Some gifted adventurer is always sailing round the world of art and science, to bring home costly merchandise from every port. But the warning truth still remains:

“One science only will one genius fit:
So wide is art, so narrow human wit.”

No fact in ancient history is less disputable than its divisions. The Greek stage encouraged no Garrick to smile away pathos in farce. The mad-dened Orestes never disappeared in the mimic of the clouds.

The caution is wise: poet and hero are weak on one side. Milton's confession of having only

the use of his left hand in prose, is a text and a homily in Criticism. Longinus says, that as often as Demosthenes affected to be pleasant in a speech, he made himself ridiculous; and if he happened to raise a laugh, it was chiefly upon himself. Dante showed an imperfect acquaintance with the capacities of Art, when he recommended the Revelation of St. John to Giotto, as a subject for his pencil. The enemies of Boileau beheld him shorn in an ode; Corneille stumbled in comedy; Sterne was beaten by his valet in learning Italian; and a regimental schoolmaster might have taken down Marlborough in spelling. Instances of intellectual infirmity are seen admonishing the scholar upon every side. Some muscle, or nerve, of arm or of eye, is always weak. Pope tossed Theobald into the *Dunciad*, but he, clinging to the back of Shakespeare, outran his tormentor as an editor. The illustration of Temple is forcible as it is homely: "The abilities of man must fall short on one side or other, like too scanty a blanket when you are abed: if you pull it upon your shoulders, you leave your feet bare; if you thrust it down upon your feet, your shoulders are uncovered."

Art, not less eloquently than Literature, teaches

her children to venerate the single eye. Remember Matsys. His representations of miser-life are breathing. A forfeited bond twinkles in the hard smile. But follow him to an altar-piece. His Apostle has caught a stray hue from his usurer. Features of exquisite beauty are seen and loved; but the old nature of avarice frets under the calm of devotion. Pathos staggers on the edge of farce. The sacred pictures of Matsys are the sermons of Sterne.

Talents to strike the eye of posterity should be concentrated. Rays, powerless while they are scattered, burn in a point. "A man ought to be one." Remember Bentley maiming Milton; Wren blundering into Gothic; and Butler daubing a portrait; The thoughts of the mind should move on some precious design, as the pivots of the watch turn on the drilled diamond. Then the mind keeps time, and does its work. Indeed, great men have always one governing series of thoughts. We are not surprised to be told that a fly interested Malebranche more than all the Greek and Roman history. What a touching example of doing one thing is furnished by Palissy, the potter! When will the furnace burn into the clay the colours of that Italian cup? Again, his

vase is in the oven; but the fire sinks, the fuel is gone; he has no money to buy more;—but courage! he brings his garden trellises, his doors, his furniture. He piles them on the flame; the spell is wrought; the victory is won; the colours live!

The thought is pleasing, that authors might reap a larger harvest, by writing books, as the brothers Both painted landscapes, or as Rubens and Snyders sometimes worked together. Do not Beaumont and Fletcher appear hand-in-hand? Pope was enriched by the gold of Bolingbroke, notwithstanding its alloy. Would not Shakespeare and Ben Johnson have played a grander strain in concert? It is certain that the revision of friends often imparts a new lustre. In this way Lucretius grew brighter under the pen of Cicero; the *Maxims* of Rochefoucauld received the exquisite temper of their edge; the sharpest eyes in Port Royal picked out the overlooked weeds of Pascal, or gathered passages for his *Provincial Letters*; and the friendly solicitude of Secker disentangled the intricate argument of Butler.

XIII

CRITICISM THE SOURCE OF MANY DELIGHTS.

EVERY river flows into branching streams—pleasant to the eye and the ear—that lose themselves among green meadows, or the pebbles of village brooks. Criticism, pursuing its way through the fruitful country of learning, detaches from its current many small tributaries, of which each has its own little patches of cornland and trees to wander along. All possess interest for the patient explorer; whether he considers the varying times of the mind's flower and ripeness, the influence of air and climate upon its bloom and growth, the art of repairing injured works, or the obligations of authors to their predecessors.

Lord Bacon considered that invention in young men is livelier than in old, and that imaginations stream into their minds more divinely. He has not defined the boundary of youth. His own thirty-sixth year had come, when he committed

to the press those golden meditations which he called *Essays*. But it is noticeable that his style opened into richer bloom with every added summer of thought. Later editions contain passages of beauty not found in the earlier; and his *Advancement of Learning*, published when he was forty-four, beams with the warmest lights of Fancy. His contemporary Hobbes was sixty-three before he put forth his evil claim to be remembered in the *Leviathan*. Sterne was forty-six when *Tristram* brought London to his door, and furnished him with the boast that he was engaged to dinners fourteen deep. I turn to greater examples. Shakespeare concluded his dramatic life at forty-seven, with the charming story of the *Tempest*, of his Plays the most joyous and airy; it is probable that Milton had reached the same age when he began the *Paradise Lost*. Why should the broad river become narrower while unnumbered springs continue to flow into it? Raffaele died in his thirty-eighth year, with his hand on the *Transfiguration*: are we to look upon that picture as the mightiest effort of an art that could climb no higher? Was there no fourth manner for the solemn light and stillness of riper manhood, which would have melted

warmer colours into his earlier drawing, speaking more fervently to the eye, without weakening his appeal to the affections?

It is impossible to make absolute laws for the mind. It has seasons of ripeness and beauty when the colour and the flavour of its fruit are in perfection. But they are irregular; sometimes they come early. Ben Johnson wrote *Every Man in his Humour* at twenty-two; and Paul Potter dropped his pencil before he was twenty-nine. Occasionally the life of the intellect seems to run itself out in one effort. All the fine juice of the vine flows into a single cluster. Zurbaran's early picture divided with Raffaele the applause of criticism in the Louvre. Akenside, at twenty-three, had a lustre of invention which each succeeding year seems to have diminished. It might be that the scholar overlaid the poet; that the essence of his fancy was drawn off in the laboratory; or that the torrent of youth brought down a few lumps of gold, and his mind had no rich vein imbedded in it, for the full strength of manhood to work.

Sometimes the flower unfolds itself in the noon. Francia stood on the threshold of his fortieth year when a picture by Perugino made him a painter.

In a few instances, it keeps its choicest odours for the evening, or the night. Dryden was nearly seventy when he completed his charming copies of Chaucer: a cripple, he tells us, in his limbs, but conscious of no decay in the faculties of his soul, excepting that his memory was somewhat weaker, and to compensate for this loss he found his judgment increased. "Thoughts come crowding in so fast upon me that the only difficulty is to choose or to reject." He had said, "In the beginning of summer the days are almost at a stand, with little variation of length, or shortness. The same is the method of nature in the frame of man. He seems at forty, to be fully in the summer tropick."

M. Angelo had nearly reached the years of Dryden when he gave the *Last Judgment* to the world. The splendour of Titian shone most towards its setting; his wonderful portrait of Pope Paul the Third was painted at seventy-two, and his magnificent *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* at eighty-one. Sixty-four summers only melted into ruddier tints the nosegay of Rubens; and Buffon assured a friend that, after passing fifty years over his desk, he was every day learning to write. Who forgets the example of Cowper?

But though the times of fruit-bearing may vary in different minds, we generally find several fine seasons following each other in succession. Consider the five years of Milton's life, between 1634 and 1639, when he wrote *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *Arcades*, and his shorter poems; take the same period in the history of Shakespeare, beginning in 1606 with *Macbeth*, and ending, in 1611, with *Othello*; or cut off an equal length from the record of Jeremy Taylor's struggles and toils: see him contributing to his own and every age, between 1647 and 1652, the *Liberty of Prophecy*, the *Great Exemplar*, the *Holy Living and Dying*, and all his nobler sermons. These are precious chapters in the biography of Genius; we ought not to be surprised if some pages of weaker interest are found before or after them.

Walking in the fields, I have seen the sun—going down in great glory—suddenly cut by a strip of dark cloud, which, nevertheless, was shown by the colour dimly shining through it to be connected with that magnificent luminary; and while I stood, the vapour melted, and the sun reappeared in all its large effulgence. My thoughts turned to the great lights which have been given to rule the intellectual day. I called to remem-

brance how the broad splendour of Genius, as it rolls along the sky of life from the morning until the evening, has its cold intervals of shadow. The radiance of its manifestation is often broken. An inferior book or picture comes between the rising and the setting glory. A black bar of cloud seems to divide the light in the middle. It is a noble and comforting recollection that when the gloom passes the mind breaks forth again, and the poet or the philosopher sinks behind the horizon of time as he rose above it, in a full orb.

The light of the morning and the evening is equally beautiful, but it differs in tone and hue. So does the imagination in the young and the old. Yet it may stream divinely into each. The tender green and the nightingale's hymn belong to the spring; the full rose and the red moon, to the summer and the harvest. The portraiture of dreams upon the eyes under trees, the smiles of love, and the enchantments of hope, are the joy and the heritage of youth; the guardianship of angels, the victories of the soul, and the calm beauty of Paradise, are the illumination and the reward of manhood and age.

It has been a subject of ingenious speculation

if country, or weather, cherish or check intellectual growth. Jeremy Collier considered that the understanding needs a kind climate for its health, and that a reader of nice observation might ascertain from the book in what latitude, season, or circumstances, it had been written. The opponents are powerful. Reynolds ridiculed the notion of thoughts shooting forth with greater vigour at the summer solstice or the equinox; Johnson called it a fantastic foppery.

The atmospheric theory is as old as Homer. Its laureate is Montesquieu. The more northerly you go, he said, the sterner the man grows. You must scorch a Muscovite to make him feel. Gray was a convert. One of the prose hints for his noble fragment of a didactic poem runs thus: "It is the proper work of education and government united to redress the faults that arise from the soil and air." Berkeley entertained the same feeling. Writing to Pope from Leghorn, and alluding to some half-formed design he had heard him mention of visiting Italy, he continues: "What might we not expect from a Muse that sings so well in the bleak climate of England, if she felt the same warm sun, and breathed the same air, with Virgil and Horace?"

When Dyer attributes the faults of his *Fleece* to the Lincolnshire fens, he only awakes a smile. Keats wrote his *Ode to a Nightingale*—a poem full of the sweet south—at the foot of Highgate Hill. But we have the remark of Dryden—probably the result of his own experience—that a cloudy day is able to alter the thoughts of a man; and, generally, the air we breathe, and the objects we see, have a secret influence upon our imagination. Burke was certain that Milton composed *Il Penseroso* in the long-resounding aisle of a mouldering cloister, or ivied abbey. He beheld its solemn gloom in the verse. The fine nerves of the mind are braced, and the strings of the harp are tuned, by different kinds of temperature. “I think,” Warburton remarked to Hurd, “you have often heard me say, that my delicious season is the autumn—the season which gives most life and vigour to my intellectual faculties. The light mists, or, as Milton calls them, the steams that rise from the fields in one of these mornings, give the same relief to the views that the blue of the plum gives to the appetite.”

Mozart composed whenever he had the opportunity, in the soft air of fine weather. His *Don Giovanni* and the *Requiem* were written in a bowl-

ing-green and a garden. Chatterton found a full moon favourable to poetic invention, and he often sat up all night to enjoy its solemn shining. The spirits of Shelley rose joyously whenever the wind blew from the north-west. Winter-time was most agreeable to Crabbe. He delighted in a heavy fall of snow, and it was during a severe storm which blocked him within doors, that he portrayed the strange miseries of Sir Eustace Grey.

The art of emendation demands the union of many talents. Porson adjusting the text of Euripides, is the architect restoring a palace. The pursuit of Genius into its treasure-house is an inferior, but a more interesting accomplishment. It is one which all readers may share, and which deserves to be called a pleasure, if not an object and advantage, of literature. The need of it is the greater, as memories are often weak. Addison copied into the *Spectator*, from an Italian ethical work of the sixteenth century, a story about a mirror and a lady, but omitted to state its foreign descent. The occupation is to be enjoyed with caution. A coincidence is not a robbery. The most agreeable of all Satirists has playfully exhibited a clever curiosity gone astray,

in the portrait of a scholar who read all books:

“ And all he reads assails,
From Dryden’s *Fables* down to Durfey’s tales;
With him most authors steal their works—not buy;
Garth did not write his own *Dispensary*.”

Swift seems to indicate the fair distinction between the theft of the scribbler and the loan of the author, by saying that the lighting a candle at a neighbour’s fire does not affect our property in the wick and flame. Milton held a torch to Ovid, and Taylor to Chrysostom. But both carried materials for burning. The ignitable substance belonged to themselves.

Some imitation is involuntary and unconscious. No mighty intellect can be altogether lost. Time only covers to reproduce it: there is nothing in the poet, or the philosopher,

“ But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.”

Plato dies in the school to appear in the pulpit. Genius is nourished from within and without. Its food is self-grown and gathered. Like a rich-bearing tree, it absorbs the juices of the soil and the balm of the air, but draws from its own sap the life that swells out the trunk, and gives colour and flavour to the fruit.

XIV

THE LESSONS OF CRITICISM

AN artist once objected to a famous painter, that he could never tell where, in nature, he found those gorgeous hues which seem to inflame his landscape, and shower purple and crimson over the field and the river. The ear of Society caught up the reply: "I daresay that you never see such colours; but do you not wish that you could?"

One of the lessons of criticism is the folly of making our own knowledge a standard of probability. Consider the bone of a reptile in the hand of a ploughman, and of Owen. The common observer notices only one hue of green, while the cultivated eye perceives a grey tint in the sun's reflection on leaves and grass. An Abyssinian traveller saw in the Bay of Tajoura the azure and gold of the most extravagant picture; and Mrs. Houston speaks of the autumn foliage in American woods as bewildering the describer by its daz-

zling varieties. "If a painter were to endeavour to depict them to life, he would be called as mad as Turner." A testimony yet more extraordinary is heard in Colonel Mitchell's exploring expedition into the interior of Tropical Australia. One day his path conducted him into a valley so sublimely grotesque that he called it "Salvator Rosa." A river was surrounded by hills, of which some took the shape of cathedrals in ruins, and others of decayed fortifications. The comparison that the scene suggested to the visitor was a sepia landscape of Martin.

Poetical images—which are the lights and landscapes of fancy—claim the benefit of these illustrations. There are deep recesses of feeling in the heart of genius, which seem not less marvellous to the common reader, than the Australian vale was to the traveller. What is unknown is not impossible. Disbelief of things because they are contrary to our experience is fatal to entertainment and truth, both in literature and in morals.

A trifling circumstance occurs to me in Thomson's account of the Dorsetshire Downs, where he speaks of their woody slopes dipping into shadow, the broad patches of cornland, and enormous flocks scattered over uninhabited tracts of coun-

try—these he calls “white.” But the epithet was an accommodation of truth to poetical custom; when he composed the *Seasons*, the sheep of Dorset were usually washed with red ochre. Suppose that he had preserved this local peculiarity, and written:

“ Pure Dorsetian downs

The boundless prospect spread, here shagged with woods,
There rich with harvests, and there *red* with sheep ;”

the whole array of town critics would have been in arms, impatient for the assault, yet certain of defeat. The amplest knowledge has the largest faith. Ignorance is always incredulous. Tell an English cottager that the belfries of Swedish churches are crimson, and his own white steeple furnishes him with a contradiction.

Criticism checks admiration in excess. Literature has its superstitions and intolerance. An acute scholar remarked that there is not an anomaly of grammar, or metre, in Milton, which has not been praised as an excellence. Raffaele is injured by the same idolatry. Look at the miraculous *Draught of Fishes*. What a boat! Richardson saw in it only the choice of a lesser evil, and wonderful skill in overcoming it; but Opie has proved that the resources of art might

easily have subdued the difficulty without offence to the judgment. What is true of Raffaele's commentators in one instance, is true of Shakespeare's continually. The idol is faultless in the eyes of his worshippers. An ingenious writer compared his poetry to St. Peter's at Rome, and recommended the reader of the drama—like the visitor in the church—when displeased by a defect to take a step further and gaze upon a beauty. The advice is good, if the blemish be not vaunted for a charm. There ought to be some strong shades between the devotee and the heretic.

We have authors in morocco who would not be recognised by their contemporaries—they are so bedizened with dress, and spangled with flattery. Much of this exaggerated praise may be resolved into self-love. The critic, like the traveller, scrawls his name upon a Pyramid. Jones lives with Cheops; Drake with Shakespeare.

It was an observation of Pope, that poets, who are always afraid of envy, have quite as much reason to be alarmed at flattery. He looked upon Shakespeare as writing to the people without views of reputation, and having, at his first appearance, no other aim than to procure a subsistence; or, as he puts the opinion in his poignant verse—

“Shakspere (whom you and every play-house bill
Style the divine, the matchless, what you will)
For gain, not glory, winged his roving flight,
And grew immortal in his own despite.”

Shakespeare himself confirms Pope's estimate of his character. He made his fortune, and forgot his plays. Having created a home and a treasure, he threw away the wand. It had done its work in sending him to Stratsford. We shall find a profitable moral in Goldsmith's amusing complaint, that he was regarded as a partisan, when his only object was to write a book that would sell.

A deep reverence for the poet may be combined with the liveliest sense of his weakness and false taste. His magnificent images, his loving wisdom, and his noble sentiments, were the beamings of that sun-like mind which shone over the whole world of nature and fancy; they were inseparably his own. His mock fights, his artificial thunder, his quibbles and grossness, were outward accidents of situation and circumstances. They were so many fragments from his festival of imagination and humour, scornfully flung to stay the hunger of the pit.

Why should Shakespeare escape the common lot? Works of Genius must be imperfect. Irregu-

larity is a law of their existence and splendour. Brilliancy, twilight, and shadow, are so many inequalities of surface along a body essentially luminous. Criticism, which does not observe the gloom, is like an imperfect telescope that discovers no spots in the sun. The true observer admits the polemical flatness of *Paradise Lost*, and the overloading sombreness of Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. The low comedy of Damætas and Mopsa displeases his ear in the *Arcadia* of Sidney, and he wishes to shade away the deep lamp-black in the *Transfiguration* of Raffaele. His love of Spenser does not reconcile his eye to a woodman in Lincoln Green during the enchanted reign of Arthur; and he thinks that S. Rosa might have selected a fitter ornament than a cannon for the tent of Holofernes.

Criticism has more dignified duties and nobler pleasures than these. It is the protector of the unfriended, and the avenger of the smitten. Newton found that a star, examined through a glass tarnished by smoke, was diminished into a speck of light. But no smoke ever breathed so thick a mist as envy or detraction. If Milton had come to us in the judgment of Waller, his original brightness would have sunk into a glimmer. In-

ferior talents suffer in their degree. Southey spoke of Flecknoe as far from being the despicable scribbler, whom Dryden pelted with such contumely; and Johnson desired to see the collected works of that Dennis, who is only viewed by most people, bespattered and raving in the pillory of Pope.

We learn from the satirist himself what perils are encountered by merit. He published the *Essay on Man* without his name. Mallet, a noisy contractor of literary all-work, called at Twickenham soon after its appearance. Pope, who delighted to do everything by stratagem, inquired the news of books. His visitor informed him that the latest publication was something about *Man*: that he had glanced at it, but, 'detecting the incompetency of the writer, soon tossed it aside. Pope with exquisite cruelty told him the secret.

He might sit in his grotto, and amuse himself with inventing new tortures for the purgatory of Dunces: his fame and fortune were sure. But suppose the author of the *Essay* to have been struggling up the hill—a Chatterton with a Walpole for a patron,—that pert fasehood of Mallet might have upset all his hopes. How often has such a catastrophe befallen the worthiest adven-

turer! Putting to sea with his first freight, the enemy—in the strong image of Jeremy Collier—has fired the beacons, drawn down the posse at his landing, and charged him while he was staggering on the beach.

In such cases criticism appears like a goddess in Homeric warfare—awful, yet sweet. Insulted genius is crowned after its death; and the eloquent panegyric is a chamber where the dead author lies in state. The scorn and the anguish of a life are recompensed by the magnificence of the mourning; while a beautiful colour seems to bathe the sleeper from the overhanging canopy. These funeral rites should be reserved for the princes of learning. Criticism bribed by the affections, by passion, or by interest, sometimes arrays the usurper in the trappings of royalty. Flattery sits at the head; and the bier is emblazoned with escutcheons. But rank in literature is neither inherited nor bestowed. If the soul of genius did not animate the author, his collapsed reputation is only lifted up like the body of Arvalan in Eastern story. The motion comes from the tread of the bearers, as the powerless, bloodless frame sways to and fro with its own ungoverned and corrupting weight.

I do not presume to speak of criticism, as it now lives and flourishes. Much, however, of the pleasure of literature rises out of its skilful and honest exercise. If there be in it little of the splenetic heart of a former century, we find abundance of untimely fruit, and confident foreheads. Its defects are twofold—a want of modesty, and a want of knowledge. A remedy of the former is to be found in the removal of the latter. A silent novitiate of five years would sow the mind. The true critic, like the deep philosopher, produces his opinions as doubts. Only the astrologer and the empyric never fail.

A thoughtful person is struck by the despotic teaching of the modern school. The decisions of the eighteenth century are reversed, and the authority of the judges is ignored. Addison's chair is filled by Hazlitt; a German mist intercepts Hurd. Our classical writers daily recede farther from the public eye. Milton is visited like a monument. The scholarly hand alone brushes the dust from Dryden. The result is unhappy. Critics and readers, by a sort of necessity, refer every production of the mind to a near standard. The age weighs itself. One dwarf is measured by another. The fanciful lyrist looks tall when Pindar

is put out of sight. This is like boarding up Westminster Abbey, and all the cathedrals, and deciding on the merits of a church, by comparing it with the newest Gothic design that, sent too soon to the roadside, implores of every passer-by the charity of a steeple.

XV

POETRY, ITS SHAPES AND BEAUTIES

POETRY is the first pleasure of literature that captivates the eye and the heart. It is the pearl shining in the bosom of the story. Whatever of beautiful, instructive, or alluring, belongs to philosophy, history, or fiction, is wrapped up in poetry. It sets the hardest lesson to music. Epicurus might have rejoiced to send his pupils to Lucretius, and the Roman farmer have found his text-book in the Georgics.

The Temple of Fame contains no sepulchres so enriched by love as those of the poets. Their memory is bound up with the histories of kings and nobles. Davenant records, in musical prose, some of the rare achievements of minstrelsy. A tyrant lived with the praise and died with the blessing of Greece, for gathering the dust of Homer into an urn; Thebes was preserved by the harp of Pindar; the elder Scipio lay in the bosom of Ennius; Lælius was flattered by the rumour of

helping Terence; Virgil brightened the purple of an Emperor; and the Capitol shouted for Petrarch.

Poetry deserves its honours as the firstborn of Literature, and the fairest. It is the richness of many gardens growing into one flower, and sowing itself over the world in shapes of beauty and colour, which differ with the soil that receives and the sun that ripens the seed. In Persia, it comes up the rose of Hafiz; in England, the many-blossomed tree of Shakespeare. And what culture it demands! That worthy, Thomas Jackson, whose works Southey would have taken with him to the desert island, has a good remark: "That very fruitful wits in all other kinds of learning cannot raise this plant of Eden, without 'more tender care and greater cherishing than any other branch or slip of the tree of knowledge.'"

Imagination is the union of likenesses, and their exhibition in new forms. It is composed of several conceptions folded into each other. For example: The memory entertains an idea of a palace; imagination embellishes it with splendid apartments, crowns it with gilded pinnacles, or embosoms it in gardens. The strange animal of the traveller bristles into the Dragon of Spenser. The Helen of Zeuxis was the blended harmony of

a five-fold loveliness; and the Hercules of Glycon showed the ennobled symmetry of his most athletic contemporaries. Raffaelle and Guido professed to have their model enshrined in one certain idea of beauty; yet it was not created in the mind. The features of life, in its purest developments, were spiritualised by imagination. A common face is thrown upon the glass, and the sun brightens it. The smallest seed contains the flower. The Greek sculptor never saw Jupiter, but he had gazed upon heroes. Milton walked in a garden before he planted Eden.

In this way the most exquisite combinations of the poet are traced back to their beginnings; whether Milton dazzles us with the flash of unnumbered swords in his dark Consistory; or Virgil brings Minerva shouting to the Greeks in the flames of Troy; or Tasso illuminates the hilltop with the feet of an angel; or Shelley compares life to a dome of glass which

“ Stains the white radiance of Eternity.”

In each case the writer had something to work upon. The outline lay in his recollection. The visible led him to the unseen. The conception opened into the image.

If we divide poetry into classic and romantic, the former will be found to bewitch the taste and the heart; the latter, the imagination and the senses. A flowing outline of calm dignity marks the Parthenon and *Samson Agonistes*. Broken shadows, mystery, and awe endear an old Gothic house and a canto of Spenser. The enchanted forest of Tasso casts a darker shade than the grove of Lucan. Warton supposes a reader to be more impressed by the black plumes on the helmet in *Otranto*, and the gigantic arm on the great staircase, than by any paintings of Ovid, or Apuleius.

However the beautiful in thought may be distinguished—classic or Gothic, descriptive or philosophical—the lover of fancy welcomes it. He drinks at every fountain of taste. In each colour and bend of the wide landscape he discovers something to admire: the cloud-capt battlements and flashing standards of the epic; the dim mountain heights of the contemplative; the sunny slope of the pastoral; or the heaving turf of the elegist. Whatever is lovely and of good report is within the reach of his sympathy. He turns from the humour of Chaucer to the dreams of Collins; as he feels opposite emotions roused

and gratified by the Woodman of Gainsborough, and the Saint of Francia.

In a true epic, he admires the palace of the Muse. Each book is a state-room full of princes and heroes. Long lines of historic ancestors and splendid achievements rise to his memory. He reads Homer with some of the sentiment with which he visits Windsor. Reflective poetry exerts its power in a different manner. The palace moulders into the cathedral; tombs replace the ancestral pictures; the cloister is the royal chamber; and death breathes the kingly consecration of time. Gay scenes sometimes invite him. Sir Hudibras talks Babylonian; Gilpin's post-chaise takes him up for Edmonton; Pope introduces a conversation-piece, sparkling as Watteau's; Thomson leads him among the ripe fruit, and under the warm shade of the garden wall; or, in idler mood, he gathers a few sonnets, the hedgeflowers of fancy, and dreams over a stanza of Parnell and Shenstone.

The advantages of poetry are many, as its pleasures are common. It makes dark weather fair, and blue skies bluer. The dimmallest day—a giant of clouds—sinks before it. Not only Shakespeare and Milton bear the sling: the fatal

pebble may be taken from a village brook. The insolent Philistine, who lords it over a noble spirit, is often vanquished and plundered by one of a ruddy countenance, coming from the country and the sheepfold.

It is worth observing how much our out-of-door pleasures are heightened by the poets. Nature,

“By all her blooms and mingled murmurs dear,”

is brought closer to the heart. The fields look greener; brighter people walk among the corn. Wordsworth crowds the forest arches with the equipage of Olympus; Spenser gilds the mossy roots of old beeches with the angel face of Una; Shakespeare sprinkles moonbeams to

“Tip with silver all the fruit-tree tops;”

Southey

“Mottles with mazy shade the orchard slope;”

and Bloomfield gathers the white clouds to rest in the evening sky, like a flock of sheep with the shepherd.

Poetry, in general, resembles a fieldpath which the whole village may walk upon. Most of its beauties are unenclosed. But here and there a choice tree, or a fine glimpse of scenery, is shut in. Only a learned taste may open the gate and show

the grounds. Akenside, Collins, Gray, and T. Warton are examples of this kind. The principle of their style is twofold: embracing—(1) the construction of a language differing from that of Society; and (2) the arrangement of it, according to the laws of design and colour. The first object is sought by blending ancient idioms with those of home; and the second by disposing the thought to captivate the eye.

It is obvious that the gratification, which such productions afford, lies beyond the sentiment, or the description, and is independent of either. A Greek or Latin phrase, suddenly encountered, is like a sketch of a ruin, or a costume, in a traveller's notebook. It carries the mind back into the scenery and the customs of ancient people. "By these means," it has been elegantly observed, "the genius of the poet, instead of leading, seems only to accompany us into the regions of his beautiful creations, while the activity of the fancy multiplies into a thousand forms the image it has received; and the memory, gathering up the most distant associations, surrounds the poet with a lustre not his own."

These are the enclosed beauties of poetry—sheltered garden-beds of curious flowers—not to

be judged by comparison with the open landscape, but to be visited and enjoyed for their own particular charms. There can be no uniformity of excellence. Each style of invention—poetic, architectural, artistic, or musical—has its own laws, and demands a trial which shall be based upon them. Marino and Cowley would not call Petrarch and Wordsworth as witnesses to character. Ariosto demurs to a summing up of Quintilian. Julio Romano represents the Hours feeding the Horses of the Sun; Landseer takes his palfrey from the meadow to prance with cavalier or lady, in the green array of the olden time. What then? Have we one measure for the most poetical and the truest of painters? Must the allegoric and the real be thrown into the same scale?

Look at the argument in another way. Hang Wilkie's *Rent-Day* and a picture of P. Veronese together. We are contrasting an interior in Goldsmith's Auburn with Milton's grandest compositions from mythology. In one, the elements of interest are few and simple—the old furniture, the weeping woman, the hard broker; nothing speaks to the imagination, or the taste; the appeal is to the heart. In the other, the materials of impres-

sion are many and costly—sculptured columns, sumptuous trains of servants, the plume and stateliness of war. The heart is untouched; all strikes the eye, and is addressed to it. Bring the beggar from the street, and he has a pulse and a tear for Wilkie; but call the scholar from his prints and statues, to appreciate the grace and the dignity of Verona. The accomplished reader tries to unite the feelings of sympathy and of taste. He acknowledges each to be a master, and admires both if he can.

Hitherto we have been considering those delights which poetry supplies to the mind. But it has other attractions. Next to its language is the tone of its voice. It makes love to the ear, and wins it with music. Certain passages possess a beauty altogether unconnected with their meaning. The reader is conscious of a strange, dreamy sense of enjoyment, as of lying upon warm grass in a June evening, while a brook tinkles over stones in the glimmer of trees. Sidney records the effect of the old ballad on himself; and Spence informs us that he never repeated particular lines of delicate modulation without a shiver in his blood, not to be expressed. Boyle was conscious of a tremor at the utterance of two verses in

Lucan; and Derham knew "one to have a chill about his head," upon reading, or hearing, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and David's lamentation for Jonathan. How deep is the magic of sound may be learned by breaking some sweet verses into prose. The operation has been compared to gathering dewdrops, which shine like jewels upon the flower, but run into water in the hand. The elements remain, but the sparkle is gone.

Of all the measures in which imagination takes its pastime, the heroic line of Milton and Shakespeare is the most rich and changeful. It is full of opportunities. Every colour and shade plays on its broken surface. No gleam of sun is lost. Its broad mirror gives space for the magnificence of imagery, and the long-drawn pomp of description; for the snowy piles of alabaster, where the chief of the angelic guard kept watch near the Eastern gate of Eden, his shield and sword "hung high with diamond flaming"; and for the bark of the Egyptian, with its silken sails and painted fans, gliding on its own shadow of gold along the glassy Cydnus.

Milton played on his metre like his organ. He brings out with a daring finger every grand and various note, sometimes—with wonderful effect—

striking a momentary crash of discord into the full swell of the music. He disregards syllables. A poet, not unworthy to criticise him, quotes the verses in which Death threatens Satan at the gates of Hell:

“ Back to thy punishment,
False fugitive! and to thy speed add wings,
Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue
Thy ling’ring—or with one stroke of this dart
Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before;”

and remarks, “The hand of a master is felt through every movement of this sentence, especially towards the close, where it seems to grapple with the throat of the reader; the hard, *staccato* stops, that well nigh take the breath, in attempting to pronounce ‘or with one stroke of this dart,’ are followed by an explosion of sound in the last line like a heavy discharge of artillery.”

Shenstone found his ear always pleased by the introduction of words—like *watry*—which, consisting of two syllables, have the fulness of three. The employment of spondees, with the melody of dactyls, is another secret of Milton’s versification. If Shakespeare be studied with equal attention, the whole power and compass of the English language will be understood. Perhaps it is sus-

ceptible of no inflection of harmony, not even the low thrill of the flageolet, which is not brought out in the passionate or familiar tones of its imperial master.

The rhyming couplet may claim the second rank. Dryden took the tinkle from the chime, by his artful and various pauses. At once majestic and easy, with the warble of the flute and the trumpet-peal, he fills and entrances the ear. The melliflence of Pope, as Johnson called it, has the defect of monotony. Exquisite in the sweet rising and falling of its clauses, it seldom or never takes the ear prisoner by a musical surprise. If Pope be the nightingale of our verse, he displays none of the irregular and unexpected gush of the songster. He has no variations. The tune is delicate, but not natural. It reminds us of a bird, all over brilliant, which pipes its one lay in a golden cage, and has forgotten the green wood in the luxury of confinement. But Dryden's versification has the freedom and the freshness of the fields. Running through his noblest harmonies, we catch, at intervals, that rude sweetness of a Scottish air which he himself heard in Chaucer. This is a great charm. He preserved the simple, unpremeditated graces of the earlier coup-

let, its confluence and monosyllabic close, while he added a dignity and a splendour unknown before. Pope's modulation is of the ear; Dryden's of the subject. He has a different tone for Iphigenia slumbering under trees, by the fountain side; for the startled knight, who listens to strange sounds within the gloom of the wood; and for the courtly beauty to whom he wafted a compliment.

The stanza to which Spenser has given a name, combines the advantages of the blank verse with the graces of the rhymed. Dryden confessed his obligations to a concord of sounds for helping him to a thought, and some of the most elaborate delineations of Spenser appear to have grown out of the necessities of his metre. Warton instances the binding of Furor by Guyon:

“ With hundred iron chains he did him bind,
And hundred knots, which did him sore constrain ;
Yet his great iron teeth he still did grind,
And grimly gnash, threatening revenge in vain :
His burning eyes, whom bloody streaks did stain,
Stared full wide, and threw forth sparks of fire ;
And more for rank despight, than for great pain,
Shakt his long locks coloured like copper wire,
And bit his tawny beard to show his raging ire.”

But for the tyranny of rhyme, we might have wanted the vivid circumstances of the fifth, sixth,

and eighth lines. The stanza, in Spenser's hand, is equal to any Rembrandt effect of shadow, or fear. Never did the armour of a knight strike more glittering rays into the dark, or a red thunderbolt tear up the ground with a fiercer plunge, than in his verse. But its nature is softer and more sunny. Its home is on the lips of love, when May throws flowers from her lap; or with the dreaming enchantress, as she slumbers, and

"on either hand upswells
The gold-fringed pillow lightly prest."

Then all the hidden melody of its soul comes forth. Listen to the description of the abode of Sleep:

"And more to lull him in his slumbers soft,
A trickling stream from high rocks tumbling downe,
And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mixed with a murmuring wind much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne:
No other noise, nor people's troublous cries
As still are wont t' annoy the walléd towne,
Might there be heard: but careless Quiet lies,
Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies."

A writer, who has thrown many pleasant lights upon poetry, reminds us that in reading this stanza we ought to humour it with a correspond-

ing tone of voice, lowering or deepening it, "as though we were going to bed ourselves, or thinking of the rainy night that had lulled us." He suggests that attention to the accent and pause in the last line will make us feel the depth and distance of the scene. This sense of remote loneliness forms a delightful peculiarity of Spenser at all seasons. A thousand miles of dark trees seem to rustle between the world and the poet. Mr. Coleridge points out the imaginative absence of space and time in the *Faëry Queen*. The haunted region has no boundary, and the reader goes with the poet, as the waking beauty followed the conquering prince

" Across the hills and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day."

His eyes are in a trance, delicious as that which held the maid, the page, and the peacock, when a sudden breeze swept through the garden, and all the clocks of that marvellous house struck together. He is in dreamland, without the wish or the power to ask, or to learn, how he came, or when he is to depart. If a faint murmur from the dim world of life break on the calm, some

sweet symphony of the silver-sounding instruments soon renews the spell:

“ A most melodious sound
Of all that might delight a dainty ear,
Such as, at once, might not on living ground,
Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere.”

The picturesque of versification shares the inconveniences of the picturesque in building; dark windows and winding galleries perplex the footstep; obscure similes and intricate epithets entangle the attention. The defects of the Spenserian stanza are classed under three heads—(1) dilation of circumstances, however insignificant; (2) repetition of words; (3) the introduction of puerile or unseemly thoughts to complete the rhyme. For the most part the skill of the poet overcomes the difficulties. His nimble hand ranges over the keys and brings the harshest notes into concord. Occasionally, however, lines are rebellious. A stanza turns upon him, but he encounters it with a resolution which reminded an ingenious critic of Hercules breaking the back of the Nemean lion. He dislocates the tender nerves of a metaphor with a merciless grasp; alters, lengthens, or cuts away words and letters. Language is his kingdom, and he rules it like a despot.

After every abatement, the stanza itself remains unequalled for breadth, richness, and sound. It is marked, moreover, by a romantic wildness, which harmonises with the visionary temper of the poem. The lingering, dying fall of the closing Alexandrine suits well the antique style, and the serious gloom of the verse. As the music rolls down the shadowy canto, which the cloud of allegory and the beams of fancy fill with a balmy twilight, we recall the anthem in a gorgeous chapel, when it sweeps along the branching roof, and trembles round the embroidered pinnacles, and sighs among the glimmering stone-work and the fading canopies, until every pillar and leaf are

“ Kissed

By sound, or ghost of sound, in mazy strife.”

It would be like reckoning the notes of the wood in spring, to dwell upon the pleasures afforded to the ear by that linked sweetness, which gives the title of “lyrical” to the dancing numbers of Cowley, and the buoyant masques of Milton and Jonson; while the laboured efforts of their genius are honoured and surveyed, the gayer language of fancy is ever on the tongue. *Paradise Lost* is laid up in cedar; but *L'Allegro* is a household word.

It was a saying of Shenstone, and experience

confirms it, that the lines of poetry, the periods of prose, and even the texts of Scripture most frequently recollected and quoted, are those which are felt to be pre-eminently musical. The simplest rhythm is softest, and the most familiar is the dearest. New forms disturb the ear by disappointing it. Perhaps the metrical innovations of Horace may help to explain the neglect which the discoveries of Pompeii suggest. Collins has not rendered the unrhymed ode popular. Southey pays in reputation for the difficulty of his tunes. Whatever changes be rung upon bells, they ought to be chimes. The compositions, to which we return with affectionate frequency, owe their interest to the cadence scarcely less than to the imagery.

XVI

SATIRE EXCLUDED FROM POETRY

THE satirist is only related to the poet when he illuminates life with fancy; ennobles invective into allegory; puts the crown upon a martyr of learning, or salts a moral malefactor in fire. As the mere outburst of passion, disappointment, or rivalry, satire is banished from the family of song. Literature loves the goodwill and peace she teaches. Quarrels in verse, or prose, never gain her protection. The abuse of Churchill melts with the winter snow. Even the mightiest word-combatants draw few eyes to the story of their struggles; and the fierce controversy of Milton has left no deeper traces behind it, than the feet of a Greek wrestler upon the dust of the arena.

Viewed in its happiest form, as a work of art, satire has one defect which seems to be incurable—*its uniformity of censure*. Bitterness scarcely admits those fine transitions, which make the har-

mony of a composition. *Aqua fortis* bites a plate all over alike. The satirist is met by the difficulty of the etcher. But he wants his opportunities of conquering it. The graver may lend emphasis to needle. The angry pen has no ally. The balance of effect can only be given by a different hand. A satire should be interpolated by a philosopher, and the gnomic wisdom of Barrow be stamped upon Pope.

If we regard satire as a picture of living manners, it has a special and independent interest. Hall's characters are portraits of the age; and in this light, even the ruffianism of Oldham possesses a certain value.

XVII

THE DRAMA, ITS CHARACTER AND ENTERTAINMENT

DRYDEN defined a play to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions, humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind. Hurd expands the view. Man is so constructed, that whatever his condition be—whether pleasurable or painful—the imagination continually presents numberless varieties of pictures conformable to his situation. These images are shaped and tinged by the circumstances of birth, feeling, and employment. The exhibition of them is the poetry, and a just representation is the art of dramatic writing. Supposing this outline to be earnestly filled up, the stage would become a school of virtue, and tragedy, in the words of Percy, be a supplement to the pulpit.

Such, according to his light, was the character of the Greek dramatist. He instructed and en-

tertained. His page was solemnised by wisdom. Hence Milton includes it among the evening amusements of his Thoughtful Man:

“Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes or Pelops’ line,
Or the tale of Troy divine;
Or what—though rare—of later age
Ennobled hath the buskin’d stage.”

The choice of subject, not more than its treatment, gave an educational tone to old tragedy. The writer selected the grandest features of national story. It is always found that a spectator is affected by the rank and remoteness of the sufferer. Belisarius asking an obolus is more touching than a blind sailor who lost his sight before the mast. Hurd puts this feeling with force: “The fall of a cottage by the accidents of time and weather is almost unheeded, whilst the ruins of a tower, which the neighbourhood hath gazed at for ages with admiration, strike all observers with concern.” And our own Shakespeare never affects us so mightily as in his portraits from history:

“When ’mid his bold design,
Before the Scot, afflicted and aghast,

The shadowy kings of Banquo's fated line
Through the dark cave in gleamy pageant passed."

The drama is the book of the people. In all countries the circumstances of a life, however rudely displayed, possess an incomparable attraction. The story-teller is the play-wright of Constantinople. The adventures of an ancient Javanese prince will hold a native assembly from evening until daylight. Yet the properties consist only of a transparent screen, with a large lamp behind it, and a hundred painted puppets, twelve inches high, cut out of buffalo-hide. The poetry is a monotonous recitative, and the action is confined to throwing the shadow of each successive figure upon the curtain.

A dramatic poet wields the sceptre of the masses, and reaches the national heart through all its organs of sensation. Eye and ear are his ministers. A brave exploit is riveted in the audience. A fine saying grows into an argument. When a moral purpose animates the author, he works it through the play. The commonest burlesque submits to the oversight of conscience.

The drama embraces and applies all the beauties and decorations of poetry. The sister arts

attend and adorn it. Spenser's lovely portrait-ure of Venus finding Diana in the wood,

"While all her nymphs did, like a garland, her enclose,"

is vividly descriptive of the honours and services which are rendered to the Muse of Tragedy. Painting, architecture, and music are her hand-maids. The costliest lights of a people's intellect burn at her show. All ages welcome her. An eloquent admirer has indicated this universal influence. He points to the king, the statesman, and the soldier gathered before her to watch the anatomy of the passions; to the artist, combining the splendour of costume and variety of characters into gorgeous processions; to the old, living over early days in recollection; and to the young, waiting with eager eyes and beating hearts for the first rustle of the curtain, which is to discover, after each rising fold, a new world of scenery, magnificence, and life.

The Preacher tells us that laughter is mad, and the Proverb of the Wise Man adds a warning that the end of mirth is heaviness. There was a deep moral in the Athenian law which interdicted a judge of the Areopagus from writing a comedy. The habit of looking at things on the ludicrous side is always hurtful. The pleasure is faint and

vanishing, and leaves behind it an apprehension of disgrace. Raffaello and Hogarth, *Comus* and the *Tale of a Tub*, are separated by a broad gulf. "It is not good to live in jest, since we must die in earnest."

No other element of literature is so susceptible and volatile as wit. It comes in and goes out with the moon; when most flourishing, it has its boundaries, from which, as Swift said, it may not wander, upon peril of being lost. This geographical chain has bound, with heavier or lighter links, the pleasantry of Lucian, the buffoonery of Rabelais, the pictures of Dryden, and the caricatures of Butler. The urbane gaiety of Horace alone preserves its freedom, and travels over the world.

Humour, which is the pensiveness of wit, enjoys a longer and a wider life. After one brilliant explosion, the repartee is worthless. The shrunken firework offends the eye; but the quiet suggestiveness of Mr. Shandy is interesting as ever; and the details of the great army in Flanders will last as long as the passage of Hannibal. Collins seems to indicate the poetical expression of humour, as distinguished from broader and coarser mirth:

"But who is he whom now she views,
In robe of wild contending hues?"

Pleasures of Literature

Thou by the Passions nursed, I greet
 The comic sock that binds thy feet !
 O Humour, thou whose name is known
 To Britain's favoured isle alone ;
 Me, too, amidst thy band admit ;
 There where the young-eyed healthful Wit,
 (Whose jewels in his crisped hair
 Are placed each other's beams to share ;
 Whom no delights from thee divide)
 In laughter loosed, attends thy side."

The pleasure of Shakespeare's comedies rises from their humour. His smile is serious. Johnson commended tragi-comedy, as giving a true reflection of those grave and trifling incidents which compose the scenes of experience. Joy and grief are never far apart. In the same street the shutters of one house are closed, while the curtains of the next are brushed by shadows of the dance. A wedding-party returns from church, and a funeral winds to its door. The smiles and the sadness of life are the tragi-comedy of Shakespeare. Gladness and sighs brighten and cloud the mirror he beholds. In this respect he differs from his contemporary, Ben Jonson, in whom is enjoyed, with special richness, the comedy of erudition. The *Alchemist*, the *Silent Woman*, and *Every Man in his Humour*, are masterpieces of a learned

pencil. Fletcher may be relished in his *Elder Brother*, and Massinger in his incomparable *Sir Giles Overreach*.

If the reader descends from the reigns of Elizabeth and James into the time of the second Charles, his gratifications of mirth are purchased by a wounded conscience. Comedy has no whole place in its body. Greek farce was riotous and insolent; yet fancy—like a summer breeze from a green farm—sometimes refreshes the hot stage. Aristophanes paints town-life with a suburb of gardens. But a blade of grass never grew in the theatre of Farquhar and his kindred. Wide was their scholarship in wit:

“ They sauntered Europe round,
And gathered every vice on Christian ground.”

Casting nets over the old world and the new, no venomous epigram, nor sparkling idiom of sin, escaped the throw. Every line glitters and stings. Upon the whole, the pleasures of the drama—tragic and comic—are larger than its advantages. In the bold figure of Cowley, it must be washed in the Jordan to recover its health. A deep purpose of religion alone can make it useful to the people. Taste may purify it, but the taint remains. It is only the water of Damascus to the leper.

Of English poets belonging to our golden age, Shakespeare has the fewest scales. His vigour of constitution threw off the ranker disease. With Fletcher's vice and Dekker's coarseness, he would have been the saddest spectacle the world has beheld of genius retaining its power, and bereft of its light.

XVIII

THE CONSOLATIONS OF POETRY

NO modern writer of verses may reckon on the good fortune of Metastasio, who gained a suit at Naples by some extempore stanzas. A friend invited the judge to her house, the poet pleaded in rhyme, and in two or three days the court decided in his favour. Future invaders of India will scarcely imitate Alexander, walking—in the lively extravagance of Davenant—after the drum from Macedon, with Homer in his pocket; and Utopia must be erected among the Afghans, before a captive regains his freedom by a few lines of an English Euripides.

Poetry is its own reward. A consoler in life, it soothes griefs; blesses poverty; rocks asleep sickness; multiplies and refines pleasures; endears loneliness; embellishes the common, and irradiates the lovely. It is the natural religion of literature. Lord Bacon explained the old superstition that a rainbow draws perfume from the ground it hangs

over, by supposing it to absorb the bloom of flowers. The dream of science is a reality of song. That bow, which fancy sets in the clouds of life, drinks fragrance from all its many-coloured joys and sorrows. The hues which it gathers, it restores with milder beauty; and the barrenest wayside of want and mourning looks green and cheerful under its brooding line of shadow.

Poetical taste is the only magician whose sceptre is not broken. The rudest hand cannot dissolve the fabric of beauty in which it dwells. Genii, unknown to Arabian fable, wait at the portal. Whatever is most precious from the loom, or the mine of fancy, is poured at its feet. Love, purified by contemplation, visits and cheers it. Unseen musicians are heard in the dark. It is Psyche in the palace of Cupid.

True poetry, sincerely cherished, is a friend for life. It accompanies us to all lands and enjoys health in every climate. Milton disembarks with the missionary in the Bay of Islands. The African waggon is a litter for Horace. The Australian shepherd meets again, in his lone hut, and by the dim flame of his tallow lamp, the old goatherd of Theocritus, whom he knew in the courts of Trinity or Christ Church. He who loves imagination and

pathos wears a ring upon his finger, more precious than that which belonged to Pyrrhus. The stone answers the wish. Some messenger

“Of many a coloured plume sprinkled with gold ”

comes to his call. The scene is changed. The street of a vast city slopes into a glade of Arcadia; an Italian moon hangs glorious between the mountain pines; the shops brighten into gay pavilions, and the trumpet of the tournament rings out its challenge; a magnificent kingdom of the East flashes through the smoke with all its pinnacles; or a Tyrian sail catches the evening light, and swells softly in the still air of time.

What peace and contentment such visions shed over the fever of our cares! And he who seeks, finds them:

“In spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.”

The history of a great statesman exemplifies the poetical enchantment. Pitt sometimes escaped from the roar of contending parties at home and abroad, into the solemn retirements of a favourite author. He left the political elements to fight outside, and barred the gates of imagination upon the storm. One visitor found him read-

ing Milton aloud, with strong emphasis, and so deeply engaged in Paradise, as to have forgotten the presence of any people in the world except Adam and Eve. Compare with this happy portrait the confession of Sir Robert Walpole to Mr. Fox, in the library at Houghton: "I wish I took as much delight in reading as you do: it would be the means of alleviating many tedious hours in my present retirement; but, to my misfortune, I derive no pleasure from such pursuits."

Of course the finest taste has the richest enjoyment, and watches in all its dewy lustre,

" The landscape gliding swift
Athwart Imagination's vivid eye."

But in whatever degree the poetical feeling may have been cultivated, the pleasure will be insured. The Muse's stone has a homely magic. The humblest appeal is never rejected. The farmer who has treasured a few lines of rural description, may bind the sheaves upon his bed of sickness; the woodbine will trail its clusters down the wall; and the broken light through the curtains be changed into the tremulous glimmer of elms on the village green. Even the old squire, no longer startling the woods with his horn, may enjoy a quiet chase in metre, clear a hedge upon a swift hexameter,

and in pursuit of the "brush," which was the pride and joy of his manhood,

"Still scour the county in his elbow-chair."

How, in all times, have the Muse's enchantments been worked! We think of Milton, after the sight of his eyes had gone from him; when the rays of early studies shone over his path; solemn notes of tragic, or livelier lyric verse, stole into his ear; and nightingales sang as sweetly in Cripple-gate, as when the April leaf trembled in his father's garden.

We remember Camoens in all his trials; gazing on land and water from that rocky chair built by Nature for him—and still called by his name—upon an isthmus of the China seas; shipwrecked, with his *Lusiad* held above the waves, and drifting upon a plank to shore; in Lisbon, waiting in solitude and darkness the return of a black servant, who helped to feed his hunger with the alms he begged; or closing his eyes—a sick mendicant and outcast—in a public hospital.

We follow the homeless Dante, with a sentence of flames hanging over his head; yet bearing, his only treasure, the seven cantos of his poem, which he had written before his exile; and ever adding

a stone to the precious structure, as the storm cleared away into short intervals of sunshine.

We weep with Tasso, in the dismal cell of St. Anne, and sometimes exult in his bright hours of returning calm, when the Eastern tale rose in its pomp, to be peopled with the grandeur and tumult of the Crusade.

What upheld the buffeted pilgrims of fame in their struggle and journey? Doubtless they felt, in all its rage, that passion for renown which the noblest of the four called

"The spur which the clear spirit doth raise,
To scorn delight, and live laborious days."

But they had other and nearer joys. An animating, mastering sense of music lived in their hearts, finding utterance in tones more lulling than the south-west wind of the Arcadia, which, in the ear of Sidney, crept "over flowery fields and shadowed waters in the heat of summer." The fragrant shades of a visionary world enclosed their melody, as thick leaves bury the singing birds when lightnings are abroad. They were conscious of the Muse's presence in sudden streams of bloom upon the air. Even the strokes of hatred and persecution lost their power, or dropped with a blunted edge. For Homer's god-

dess, warding off the dart from her favourite, is ever an allegory of the poet on the battle-field of the world, where beauty—his mind's mother—throws forward her bright garment, and intercepts the arrow from the enemy's bow.

And thus it happens that the poet, rich in poverty, carries with him grapes to quench his thirst, and greenest boughs to shelter his repose. The stormy day is better for him than the calm. We are told by naturalists that birds of paradise fly best against the wind; it drifts behind them the gorgeous train of feathers, that only entangles their flight with the gale. Pure imagination, of which the loveliest of winged creatures is the fitting emblem, seems always to gain in vigour and grace by the tempests it encounters, and in contrary winds to show the brightest plumage.

It is a happy feature of English teaching that the child is fed so largely with poetical fruit. A love of the good and the beautiful is thus entwined with the growing mind, and becomes a part of it. Sometimes the muscular ivy does not clasp the oak with a stronger embrace. A remembered verse is pleasing for its own sake, and for the associations which it revives. When Sir Joshua Reynolds, with other English visitors to the Opera

in Venice, heard a ballad, played in every street of London before they left it, the tears rushed to their eyes, and home, with all the endearments and friends, rose before them.

“Such is the secret union, when we feel
A song—a flower—a name—at once restore
The attention.”

Most affectingly has a late historian expressed the feeling of unnumbered hearts; “They who have known what it is when afar from books, in solitude, or in travelling, or in intervals of worldly care, to feed on poetical recollections, to recall the sentiments and images which retain by association the charm that early years once gave them—they will feel the inestimable value of committing to the memory, in the prime of its power, what it will easily receive and indelibly retain.”

Nor, if the gathering of flowers sometimes awake an ambition to grow them—if the reader, smitten with love of an ode, set himself to produce one—is the injury to his own mind, or the inconvenience to his friends, likely to be of particular moment. He may mistake his calling and his powers—may believe himself born to write, instead of to judge; but next to excellence is the desire of it. A poem that bloomed through the

little day of domestic reputation, often blends itself healthfully with the atmosphere of home; as the rose, in the thought of Azais, after its leaves are strewed on the ground, mingles its odours with the air, and continues a purifying work when its colour has departed.

Poetry is born to be the companion of youth. Morning hours may be fleeting as they are fair. Sometimes the flower of the grass is not withered sooner. Temptations and cares overleap the garden. A blazing sword appears at the gate. The hard paths of toil are to be trodden, and the soil of life is to be tilled. But why should manhood and poetry no longer take sweet counsel together, and walk through the world as friends? Age, with its bereavements and compensations, will endear them more and more to each other. Do not take away a friend, who dries the tear, and a voice that sings in the night. Whatever ills befall them by the way, let youth and fancy go out of Paradise hand-in-hand.

XIX

FICTION: THE ROMANCE AND THE NOVEL

A POEM, unfettered by metre, takes the name of romance. The genealogy of fiction furnishes another proof of the diffusion of mental pleasures. The same stories continually appear with an altered complexion. The cat of Whittington made the fortune of a merchant of Genoa, as well as of a Lord Mayor of London. Llewelyn's greyhound has a second grave very distant from Bethgelert. It sleeps and points a moral in Persia. Dear Red Riding Hood puts off her cloak by a Danish fireside. The dart of Abaris, which carried the philosopher whithersoever he desired it, gratifies later enthusiasts in travel, as the Cap of Fortunatus and the space-compelling boots of the nursery Hero. The helmet of Pluto, which protected Perseus in his desperate combat with Medusa, has frequently shielded humbler heads as the Fog-cap of the North; while the ring of Gyges

transferred its advantages of secrecy to the mask of Arthur.

For practical purposes, prose fiction may be divided into (1) the romance, which is the legend of heroic, and (2) the novel, which is the news of common life. The romance flourishes in the ignorance, the novel in the refinement of a nation. The fourteenth century asks for exploits of Charlemagne; the nineteenth, how the Duke of Fairlight dines. The same feeling may still be traced in the contrasts of barbarism and civilisation. The wild Arab by his watch-fire, listens out the night to the music of spears in the fierce foray; the Japanese gentleman, mooring his splendid boat under a tree, hears his fashionable tale from the story-teller, who collects the gossip of his neighbourhood.

With ourselves, fiction is only one of the countless pleasures by which curiosity is amused. But to remoter students it presented the collected charms of literature. We can hardly realise the fascinations of romance in ages when ability to read a book was a rarer accomplishment than the writing of it would be at present. A Gothic story, before the Fress vulgarised wonders, was a treasure to be catalogued with the statutes of the

realm. The will of a Scottish baronet, in 1390, includes both in the same bequest. Such a book was the pride of the eyes:

“Princes and kings received the wondrous gift,
And ladies read the work they could not lift.”

The scribe, the artist, and the binder lavished their time and skill. Six years were not unfrequently spent upon the internal decorations. The margin was enriched with grotesque portraits, magnificent dresses, flowers, and fruits. Silver letters shone on a purple ground. Golden roses studded a covering of crimson velvet; and clasps of precious metal, richly chased, shut up the adventurous knights and the radiant damsels in their gorgeous homes. Wonderful were the doings within! Crabbe has playfully unfolded some of them in harmonious verse:

“Hark ! hollow blasts through empty courts resound,
And shadowy forms with staring eyes stalk round ;
See ! moats and bridges, walls and castles rise,
Ghosts, fairies, demons, dance before our eyes ;
Lo ! magic verse inscribed on golden gate,
And bloody hand that beckons on to fate.
‘And who art thou, thou little page, unfold ?
Say, doth thy lord my Claribel withhold ?
Go, tell him straight—Sir Knight, thou must resign
The captive Queen : for Claribel is mine.’

Away he flies ; and now for bloody deeds,
Black suits of armour, masks, and foaming steeds ;
The Giant falls ; his recreant throat I seize,
And from his corselet take the massy keys."

The knight and lady of high degree did not keep these worthies to themselves. Over their ample pages, poetical eyes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pored with untiring satisfaction. Southey discovered in the *Amadis of Gaul* the Zelmane of the *Arcadia*, the Masque of Cupid of the *Faëry Queen*, and the Florizel of the *Winter's Tale*.

The romance of chivalry replaced the Heroic in a reduced and feeble copy. It was the incredible in water-colours. We miss the knights and the enchanters with their enormous capacities. Things that never could be done, are, indeed, accomplished in every page; but the actors look diminutive and tame. They want the dauntless vivacity of their predecessors. The epic of falsehood was closed.

Years passed by, and fiction put on another shape, and received the name, without the inheritance, of Minerva. Mediæval exaggerations were clothed in modern dresses. Giants, living in impregnable castles, gave way to heroes of pre-

ternatural stature in their sentiments, who raved through four volumes—sometimes five—for dark ladies of impossible beauty. What a geography was theirs! Puck found himself outrun. The chronicler of the sayings and doings of the Black Penitents put a girdle round the world, in considerably less than forty minutes. Time and space were mere circumstances. Kingdoms fraternised. Constantinople abutted on Moorfields; and Julius Cæsar conquered Mexico with Cortes. Probability was despised. Everything came to pass when it was wanted; and the healthiest people died the moment they were in the way.

The incidents of these tales resembled drop-curtains in small theatres. The effect was terrible. The vicar's daughter, watching a fine sunset from the churchyard, was ruthlessly carried off by banditti, who stepped out of a Salvator on purpose. Perhaps the scene was laid in a mountain country, and about the middle of the first volume, a sentimental youth was entranced, during a moonlight walk, by unearthly strains of music proceeding from a lady in white muslin, who stood with her harp upon a pinnacle of frozen snow, where the wild goat, in these prosaic days, would not find a footing. These extravagances melted

before the creations of Scott, and a fourth class of fiction delighted the world. The Waverley tales might claim a discourse for themselves. "When I am very ill indeed, I can read Scott's novels, and they are almost the only books I can then *read*"—how many sad and weary hearts are echoing every day the gratitude of Coleridge. I would not say, with Charlotte Brontë: "For fiction, read Scott alone." Is not Jane Austen here with home truth and scenery to delight us? But what a Wizard he is with the unreal trowel—to use his own words; and how he outwent his own praise of Defoe, in dramatising a legend, and presenting it before the reader in speech and action. And, then, remember the healthy glow in the blood, of which we are conscious, while reading him; the breezy, open-air sense of the wide moor, or the sounding sea.

I am not competent to speak of later styles and performances, and will not venture to say whether the irony of Cowper be applicable to our own days:

"And novels—witness every month's Review—
Belie their name, and offer nothing new."

But the hastiest observer cannot fail to mark that in gay, as in graver efforts, our century is the era of revised editions. Richardson, Smollett,

and their contemporaries, come out in clever abridgments, adapted to the changes of taste, and under various titles. Old friends revisit us with new faces. Amelia has watched the dying embers for a dozen husbands, since Fielding left her; and Uncle Toby's mellow tones have startled us down a college staircase, and through the railing of counting-houses in the city. Gentlemen and heroines from whom we parted many years ago, with slight respect for their attainments and morals, have now taken a scientific, or a serious turn. Lovelace is absorbed in entomology; and Lady Bellaston is a rubber of brasses.

In considering the objects of Prose fiction, I am led to think it most useful, as it is most poetical. The grandest outlines of character afford the healthfullest examples. On this account, heroic and chivalrous legends have peculiar advantages. Their colossal virtues are links between the human and a higher organisation. They show a sort of middle life. Imagination presenting to the mind ideal forms of beauty and courage, is a faint shadow of faith by which the unseen things of another existence are brought in later years before us. An ennobling element of thought is wanted; and a reflective observer predicted a

deficiency of generous, brave, and devout feelings in the manhood of a person, in whose youth he discovered a severe restriction of the mind to bare truth and minute accuracy, with dislike of the fanciful, the tender, and the magnificent. Johnson seems to have held the same opinion. Writing to Mrs. Thrale about the education of her daughter, he said: "She will go back to her arithmetic again,—a science suited to Sophy's cast of mind; for you told me in the last winter that she loved metaphysics more than romances. Her choice is certainly laudable, as it is uncommon; but *I would have her like what is good in both.*" If life be a curious web, which each man and woman is obliged to weave, why should not a thread of gold run through the texture? There is a better quality even than prudence. We meet people every day who think themselves wise because they are selfish. Cut a leaf from a ledger, and you have their life.

The importance of the romantic element does not rest upon conjecture. Pleasing testimonies abound. Hannah More traced her earliest impressions of virtue to works of fiction; and Adam Clarke gives a list of tales that won his boyish admiration. Books of entertainment led him to

believe in a spiritual world; and he felt sure of having been a coward, but for romances. He declared that he had learned more of his duty to God, his neighbour, and himself, from *Robinson Crusoe*, than from all the books—except the Bible—that were known to his youth. These grateful recollections never forsook him, and the story of Defoe was put into the hands of his children as soon as they were able to read it. Sir Alexander Ball informed Coleridge that he was drawn to the navy, in childhood, by the pictures which that *Ancient Mariner* left on his mind.

It would be an idle endeavour to answer the objections which have been urged against fiction. But on one of the perils most earnestly deprecated—the disregard of harmony between the means and the end—a few remarks may be offered. Let me take the objector's own case, and put it in stronger colours. A young man is in love with a lady of higher station, who is not blind to his merits; but her parents talk of settlements, and he has nothing but hope. How is the difficulty to be overcome? In the easiest way. Twenty years ago, a gentleman came to London from the New Forest, rejected and desperate. All his affections were shattered. With one

wrench he cast off his country and his attachment together. He sails to India; works hard; gets promoted; and comes home with two hundred thousand pounds, and a portfolio of tigers. What has he to do with the story? Everything. This fortunate adventurer is the lover's uncle, although nobody knew of the relationship. Well; he has landed at Portsmouth, and is riding leisurely by a dark wood to look at a house which is to let, with a small portmanteau strapped on his horse. This is the moment. Three footpads spring from the trees; robbery and murder seem inevitable, when his nephew—the young man who could not get married, and who had been reading Hammond's *Elegies* on a stile—rushes to the rescue. The plunderers disappear; the kinsmen recognise each other; the brave defender receives on the spot a cheque for ten thousand pounds, and departs by the night coach to tell the news to Cecilia. Of course, every difficulty vanishes; the marriage is solemnised, and the last chapter ends in a peal.

Now suppose this adventure, in all its absurdity, to be really written and read, who is likely to be injured by it? Is it worth a moralist's trouble to work himself into a frenzy, and to say that his

“indignation is excited at the immoral tendency of such lessons to young readers, who are thus taught to undervalue and reject all sober, regular plans for compassing an object, and to muse on improbabilities till they become foolish enough to expect them?”

In the first place, it may be denied that one young man in a million ever built his hopes of prosperity or love upon recollections of visionary relatives in Benares. Even real uncles are forgotten when they never return. And, secondly, it is not to be assumed that the remote contingencies of life ought to be always rejected as hurtful. Good fortune is an useful delusion. The improbabilities of experience are many, the impossibilities are few. The rich kinsman may not arrive from India to make two hearts happy; but circumstances do fall out in a way altogether contrary to expectation; helping friends rise up quite as strangely as apparitions of Nabobs from the jungle; and the dearest chains of affection are sometimes riveted by means scarcely less astonishing, and certainly not more anticipated, than the magical cheque of the dreamer. Instead, therefore, of starting from a romantic danger, I am inclined, under proper limitations, to welcome

a moral advantage. It is something to keep the spirits up in so long and harassing a journey; and even the pack-horse goes better with his bells. That passion, which is the informing spirit of romance, may supply true discipline to the mind. A great master has said, "What though the pursuit be fruitless and the hope visionary, the result may be a real and substantial benefit of another sort; and the vineyard may have been cultivated by digging in it for a treasure which is never to be found."

This conclusion invites me to remember another pleasure which Prose fiction shares with poetic, in withdrawing its readers, for a while, from the discomforts of their condition. It pours sunlight on the dingiest window, and sows a rosy hedge round a ruinous dwelling. Sterne justly commended it for cheating fear and sorrow of many weary moments, and leading the traveller from the hard road to stray upon enchanted ground. Naturally, the writer himself feels the liveliest power of the spell. Rousseau wrote the letters of Julia on small sheets of paper, which he folded and read in his walks, with as much rapture as if they had been sent to him by the post; and Richardson wept for Clementina, as for a real

sufferer. The reader enjoys the same enchantment according to his sensibility. Petrarch was so affected by Boccaccio's story of Griseldis, that he wished, as he assured his friend, to get it by heart; and he mentions a scholar who, having undertaken to read it to a company, was interrupted by his tears.

If we look into biography, we find that the most refined and the strongest thinkers—the theologian, the poet, and the metaphysician—have turned a kind eye upon fiction, which beguiled the leisure and refreshed the toil of Gray and Warburton, of Locke and Crabbe.

One advantage of this branch of literature deserves to be specified with particular earnestness. It gives instruction in amusement. Addison acknowledged that he would rather inform than divert his reader; but he recollected that a man must be familiar with wisdom before he willingly enters on Seneca and Epictetus. Fiction allures him to the severe task by a gayer preface. Embellished truths are the painted alphabet of larger children. "We endure reproofs from our friends in leather jackets," remarked a scholar to the lively lady of Streatham, "which we should never

W. G. Thrale

P. J. Johnson

support, if pronounced by our contemporaries in lace and tissue."

Fiction, like the drama, speaks to our hearts by motion. Mr. Allworthy was acting a sermon upon charity, when the gentle pressure of the strange infant's hand on one of his fingers—seeming to implore assistance—out-pleaded, in a moment, the indignant proposal of Mrs. Deborah to put it in a warm basket—as the night was rainy—and lay it at the Church-warden's door; Corporal Trim's illustration of death, by the falling hat in the kitchen, strikes the fancy more than a climax of Sherlock; and the Vicar of Wakefield in the prison is a whole library of theology made vocal.

In proportion to the facility and the vividness of the lesson, must be the oversight of its character. Richardson never sustained a heavier blow than the fond essayist inflicted, when reading *Pamela* on the grass of Primrose Hill, and being joined by a friendly damsel, who desired to read in company, he confessed, "I could have wished it had been any other book." However ingeniously the highly-coloured scenes of the classic novelists may be defended, the sober judgment will never be convinced. To say that they

conduct the history to its catastrophe, and have their sting drawn by the moral, is like telling us to live tranquilly over a cellar of combustibles, because an engine with abundance of water is at the end of the street.

Walter Scott regarded the vices and follies of Fielding's celebrated hero as those which the world soon teaches to all, and to which society is accustomed to show so much forbearance. But it has been well observed, that he neglected to estimate the extent to which that false indulgence may be the effect of an immoral literature, operating through a long course of years upon the individual minds of which society is composed. Men are quickly acclimatised in sin; and the eye, familiar with disease, is not offended by a few spots on the page.

During the early popularity of Smollett and Fielding, Johnson contributed some wise suggestions respecting the employment of fiction. He advised the novelist to display virtue in its ideal beauty, not angelical, or improbable,—because we only imitate what we believe,—but the purest and noblest within our reach. This selected character he wished to be carried through the various changes and trials of life, in order that

by its victories and its patience—the afflictions it vanquished or endured—we may be taught what to hope and what to perform. His concluding sentence is fatal to great names: “Vice should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it as to reconcile it to the mind. Whenever it appears it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and the meanness of its stratagems; for while it is supported by parts or spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred.”

Such are some of the pleasures of fiction. As the romance, its object is to raise the mind by proposing to it for imitation characters of purity, courage, and resignation; as the novel, its work is to check and amend the little weaknesses of temper, by humbling reflections of them upon the mirror of the tale. When fiction fulfils one or other of these duties, it deserves to be numbered among the aids to education. The finer feelings are called forth, and objectionable peculiarities are repressed. If this result, in some measure at least, be not produced, the amusement is vain. Emotions are worthless which do not grow into deeds; and the glass of manners is consulted to no purpose, unless the defect which it

exhibits be removed or weakened. The fruit of fiction, regarded only as a luxury, will always be bitter; and we may expect to confirm the hard saying, which accused it of enervating the understanding and corrupting the heart.

XX

HISTORY AND ITS LESSONS

HISTORY presents the pleasantest features of poetry and fiction:—the majesty of the epic; the moving accidents of the drama; the surprises and moral of the romance. Wallace is a ruder Hector; Robinson Crusoe is not stranger than Cræsus; the Knights of Ashby never burnish the page of Scott with richer lights of lance and armour, than the Carthaginians, winding down the Alps, cast upon Livy. Froissart's hero has all the minute painting of Richardson's. The poetic element is the life-blood of the story.

History, in its simplest shape, is the account of a journey to investigate a country, its inhabitants, or one particular character. St. Paul told the Galatians that he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter—meaning to say, that he visited the Apostle to make himself more familiar with his mind and feelings. If St. Paul had written all that he saw and heard during the fifteen days of his abode

it would have been a "history." Of this pure form Herodotus offers the largest and the best specimens. His narrative is generally founded upon his observation. He surveyed the battle-fields which he describes, but, keeping no regular journal, and relying upon memory and a few notes, he fell into some inaccuracies. For the most part, however, he has the freshness of an eye-witness. His picture of Egypt is a moving panorama of the Nile. Into whatever region he travels, he makes the reader a companion; whether gazing upon the superb palace of Sais and its lighted hall of odours, the sepulchral Pyramids, or Babylon—even then in her waning splendour—as she rose to the Prophet's eye, "the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency." The interest of this familiar manner is lively and lasting, and recalls that pleasant garrulity of Comines, which led an old French reader to think himself in the company of an honest gentleman who fought all his battles over again when the cloth was removed.

The same feeling of reality, in a severer tone, pleases us in Thucydides. Recording the troubles of Peloponnesus, he is Wellington telling the tale of the Peninsular War. To the same class,

in ancient days, belong Sallust and Tacitus; in modern, Guicciardini and Clarendon.

The second manifestation of history is that of narrative founded on information drawn from others. It is Paul's visit to Peter related by Luke; or, the Spanish expedition of Scipio told by Polybius on the testimony of Lælius. Our Venerable Bede is a humbler example.

History, in its third variety, loses the authority of observation. The only eye-sight employed is the critical. State-papers replace witnesses. Johnson indicated one of the inconveniences of this change: "He who describes what he never saw, draws from fancy. Robertson paints minds, as Sir Joshua paints faces in a history-piece."

History may be considered in three lights—a pleasurable, an educational, and a moral: (1) as it entertains the fancy; (2) opens new sources of instruction; (3) and cherishes, or enlarges feelings of virtue. In the first light, its poetical relationship is clearly marked. Imagination creates no grander episodes than the rise and fall of empires. To watch the first smiles and motions of national life in its cradle; to trace the growth, the maturity, and the decline of kingdoms; to observe one

side of the world brightening in the sun of civilisation, while the other lies vapoury and cold; to see, in the course of years, the flourishing region become dim, and the dark country glimmer into warmth; Athens ascend into daylight, and Egypt sink into shadow; learning set over Greece to rise upon Italy; and die at Rome to be rekindled at Bagdad,—these are visions that dazzle the eyes, and people the fancy of a poet.

It may be questioned whether modern research be as profitable as it is ingenious. Thucydides no longer weeps at the recitation of Herodotus. Legends of beauty continually disappear, and the rents in history become plainer as the ivy is torn away. Some eyes look sorrowfully upon this reformation. In the exquisite image of Landor, it is like breaking off a crystal from the vault of a twilight cavern, out of mere curiosity to see where the accretion ends and the rock begins.

The historian has one advantage over the poet. He is not obliged to look abroad for shining illustrations, or corresponding scenes of action. His images are ready; his field of combat is enclosed. He wants only so much fancy as will supply colour and life to the description. Read the meeting of Cyrus and Artaxerxes in Xenophon. A white

cloud spots the horizon; presently it grows bigger, and is discovered to be the dust raised by an enormous army. As the cloud advances, its lower edge of mist glitters in the sun; spear, and helm, and shield shoot forth and vanish, and soon the ranks of horse and foot, with the armed chariots, grow distinctly visible. This is the splendour of the epic; it is Homer in prose.

In a different manner, take Drinkwater's description of the burning of the Spanish batteries at the siege of Gibraltar. A column of fire, rolling from the works, lights up the soldiers and the surrounding objects; ship after ship is caught in the conflagration; the sea is dyed in a red blaze, and through the drifting smoke dart the flames of the English guns. Tacitus, whom Warton calls a great poet, might furnish many dark scenes; as the sufferings of the Roman army under Cæcina, the dying watch-fires, the troubled slumbers, and the Spectre dabbled in gore. A volume of Livy is a gallery of sketches.

For an instance of the dramatic in modern history, the reader may go to Dalrymple. Dundee, wandering about Lochaber, with a few miserable followers, is roused by news of an English army in full march to the Pass of Killiecrankie. His hopes

revive. He collects his scattered bands, and falls upon the enemy filing out of the stern gateway into the Highlands. In fourteen minutes infantry and cavalry are broken. Dundee, foremost in pursuit, as in attack, outstrips his people; he stops, and waves his hand to quicken their speed; while he is pointing eagerly to the pass, a musket-ball pierces his armour. He rides from the field, but, soon dropping from his horse, is laid under the shade of trees that stand near; when he has recovered of the faintness, he desires his attendants to lift him up, and, turning his eyes to the field of combat, inquires how things went. Being told that all is well, he replies with calm satisfaction, "Then I am well!" and expires.

Our poets have drawn splendid pictures of heroes falling in battle. Ben Jonson shows Cati-line with his fierce hands still moving among the slain; Burns exhibits the warrior holding forth a bloody welcome to death; and Scott surpassed both in Marmion waving his broken sword over his head, and shouting "Victory!" But the closing scene of Dundee is the most affecting. Every circumstance heightens the catastrophe. His bed is the wild heather, shut in by a mountain bastion, of which the gloom is broken by frequent

flashes of random guns. The pass stretches in dreary twilight before us. The sound is in our ears of a dark river, foaming among splintered rocks—ever tumbling down and losing itself in thick trees, while the eagle utters a lonely scream over the carnage, and sails away into the rolling vapours.

History enjoying the pomp and circumstance of poetry, is confined within narrower boundaries, and governed by stricter laws. Its portraits ought to be likenesses, so far as the writer's industry may acquaint him with the features of his characters. Peter the Great is always brutal on one side; and the senatorial dignity of Titian only allegorises a French convention. But popular opinion allows more liberty to the pen and the pencil. It makes faithfulness subordinate to impression. Hannibal is never to be one-eyed, nor Marshal Vendôme humpbacked. The fame of a statesman must be written on his face, and the victories of a general in his muscles. No lean hand may grasp the spear of Achilles. A Dutch Scipio shuffles off the burgomaster, and strides into his frame in a toga.

This view is encouraged by Reynolds, speaking the sentiment of an age when Garrick played

Macbeth in a court-dress, with bag-wig and sword; and West astonished the world of art by exhibiting the death of Wolfe in all the simple grandeur of its truth. Reynolds, indeed, acknowledged his error in that half-hour which he spent before the finished picture of the hero; yet it may be conjectured that his prejudice was rather modified than removed. His theory of classical dignity in general would probably remain as it was before; and the ennobled presence of St. Paul in the cartoon be still the object of his admiration. The epical prince of Raffaele may be nearer to nature than the vulgar mechanic of Bassano; but the thoughtful eye looks for a middle form of expression, which shall be heroic, while it is real, and familiar, without being common. A painter is a historian writing with a pencil. But would Aquila and his wife have recognised their Hebrew brother—"in his bodily presence mean"—who abode with them, and wrought at Corinth? or would Lydia, the seller of purple, have known, by a glance, the stranger whom she met along the river-side at Philippi? The moral of an exploit vanishes in the exaggeration of the doer. Surely that art is the truest which preserves and dignifies a defect. Let Agesilaus keep his hobble; and the neck of

Augustus be awry in the marble. Show Falkland with an ungainly figure, and a rustic face brightened by inward beauty. Are we to look for a hero whose nobility is of the soul, and to behold only the tallest grenadier of the column? Why should Johnson's eyes be alike upon canvas? Is Milton to be cropped in a frontispiece?

We have an example of this false history-painting in the story of Nelson's coat at Trafalgar. He is reported to have silenced the affectionate importunity of his officers, entreating him to conceal the stars on his breast, by saying, "In honour I gained them, and in honour I will die with them." This is the utterance of the great style. Tacitus could not have put a finer sentiment into the mouth of Agricola. But its merit is simply imaginative. Dr. Arnold heard the facts from Sir Thomas Hardy. Nelson wore on the day of the battle the same coat which he had worn for weeks, having the Order of the Bath embroidered upon it; and when his friend expressed some apprehension of the badge, he answered him that he was aware of the danger, but that it was "too late then to shift a coat."

The circumstance suggests a caution not to look on great causes of great things. A pamphlet

often unlocks an octavo. Nothing is too contemptible to make a political catastrophe. The Peace of Utrecht was a squabble of the bedchamber; and we have the assurance of Burke that the war-cry of Walpole's enemies was only the hunger of party breaking its chain.

History is to be regarded in an educational light, as it opens new sources of information. A scholar is six thousand years old, and learned brickmaking under Pharaoh. Never lived such a citizen of the world; he was Assyrian at Babylon, Lacedæmonian at Sparta, Roman at Rome, Egyptian at Alexandria. He has been by turns a traveller, a merchant, a man of letters, and a commander-in-chief; presented at every court, he knew Daniel, and sauntered through the picture gallery of Richelieu. Dryden called history a perspective glass, carrying the mind to a vast distance, and taking in the remotest objects of antiquity.

How many battles by sea and land the student has witnessed! He clambered with the Greeks along the rocky shore of Pylus; he heard the roar of falling houses when the Turks stormed Rhodes; three times he was beaten back with Condé by that terrible Spanish infantry, which tossed off

the French fire like foam from the cliff; he recognised Dante in the struggle of Campaldino; stood by the side of Cervantes when an arquebus carried away his left hand; and stooped with a misty lantern over the bleeding body of Moore.

A cultivated reader of history is domesticated in all families; he dines with Pericles, and sups with Titian. The Athenian fish-bell invites him to the market to cheapen a noisy poulterer, or exchange compliments with a bakeress of inordinate fluency. A monk illuminating a missal, and Caxton pulling his first proof, are among the pleasant entries of his diary. He still stops his ears to the bellowing of Cleon; and remembers, as of yesterday, the rhetorical frown of the old tapestry, and the scarlet drapery of Pitt.

To study history is to study literature. The biography of a nation embraces all its works. No trifle should be neglected. A mouldering medal is a letter of twenty centuries. Antiquities, which have been beautifully called history defaced, compose its fullest commentary. In these wrecks of many storms, which time washes to the shore, the scholar looks patiently for treasure. The painting round a vase, the scribble on a wall, the wrath of a demagogue, the drollery of a farce, the

point of an epigram—each possesses its own interest and value. A fossil court of law is dug out of an orator; and the Pompeii of Greece is discovered in the Comedies of Aristophanes.

Lord Bacon denounced abridgments with eloquent anger. But who can traverse all history? When Johnson was asked by Boswell if he should read Du Halde's account of China, he said, "Why, yes, as one reads such books—that is to say, consult." Of many large volumes the index is the best portion and the most useful. A glance through the casement gives all needful knowledge of the interior. An epitome is only a book shortened; and, as a general rule, the worth increases as the size lessens. There is truth in Young's comparison of elaborate compilations to the iron money of Lycurgus, of which the weight was so enormous, and the value so small, that a yoke of oxen only drew five hundred pounds sterling. The lives of nations, as of individuals, concentrate their lustre and interest in a few passages. Certain episodes should be selected; such as the ages of Pericles and Augustus, Elizabeth and Leo, Louis XIV. and Charles V. Sometimes a particular chapter embraces the wonders of a century; as the feudal system, the dawn of discovery, and

the printing press. The fragments ought to be bound together by a connecting line of knowledge, however slender, encircling the whole fields of inquiries. The regal, the ecclesiastical, and the commercial elements are to be combined. The visitor must not spend his leisure in the Coliseum, to the exclusion of St. Peter's; nor think himself familiar with London, unless he goes to the Exchange.

The third aspect of history is the moral, as it cherishes the feelings of virtue, and enlarges their action. Southey felt confident that Clarendon, put into his youthful hands, would have preserved him from the political follies which he lived to regret and outgrow. Guicciardini, also, has some claim to his reputation of communicating high thoughts to his readers; but the assertion that historians, in general, have been the true friends of virtue, will be rejected by all except the credulous, or the indifferent.

We have only one national record of which the single design is to elevate and direct the mind. Jewish history is God's illuminated clock set in the dark steeple of time. It is man's world which common narrative describes. Actions are weighed in man's scales. The magnitude of a deed deter-

mines its character. Paul Jones is a pirate; Napoleon is a conqueror. One assassination is a murder; ten thousand deaths are glory. Yet it is supposable that, in the eyes of angels, a struggle down a dark lane and a battle of Leipsic differ only in excess of wickedness.

History is a moral teacher, however, in despite of its ministers. When Poussin gathered a handful of dust from the ground, and declared it to be ancient Rome, he was abridging philosophy in an epitaph. Tyre, burned by Alexander, and sacked by the Mamelukes, is a homily on fortune.

“What does not Fate? The tower that long had stood
The crashing thunder and the warring winds,
Shook by the sure but slow destroyer Time,
Now hangs, in doubtful ruin o’er its base,
And flinty pyramids and walls of brass
Descend. The Babylonian spires are sunk ;
Achaia, Rome, and Egypt moulder down.
Time shakes the stable tyranny of thrones,
And tottering empires sink with their own weight.”

There is a sound of solemn sadness in the saying, that the glory of man is but as the flower of grass—a more perishable thing than the grass itself, more alluring to the eye, but exposed to fiercer enemies, and to the swifter ruin of the

scythe. They are gone—the tyrants of ancient dynasties, with their splendour and cruelty—and have bequeathed to their successors the warning voice of the Prophet, “*Where will ye leave your glory?*” Think of the question having been asked of Sesostris, or Belshazzar! But so it comes to pass. Their magnificence is taken off, like robes and crowns when a coronation is over. The great conqueror strikes his sword into life, and a gulf yawns between Cæsar and his legions. The glory remains on this side of the chasm. The light of an empire dies out, like embers on a cottager’s hearth. All the flashing shields of Persia, with the throne of Xerxes in the midst, could not cast one ray into the shadows. How is the king to summon his guard? What bridge may swing across the darkness between eternity and time?

But history teaches another lesson from the grandeur of olden monarchs, before the moth fretted their purple. It was not alone the crumpled roseleaf that tortured their enervated senses. Fears, mysterious and spectral, continually rose up with menacing aspect. Oriental annals are funeral sermons. Southey has painted, with a truthful sublimity, the feelings of Mohammedan sovereigns,—mourners in magnificent festivals,

wretched in the sunshine and smiles of beauty, and ever listening, in the golden palace, for the destroyer's trumpet at the gate. The apprehension haunted them in youth, and overwhelmed them with a horrible dread in age. A vision in the night, a strain of music, a strange face in needle-work, startled them into tears. "Haroun al Raschid opened a volume of poems, and read, 'Where are the kings, and where are the rest of the world? They are gone the way which thou shalt go. O thou who choosest a perishable world, and callest him happy whom it glorifies, take what the world can give thee, but death is at the end!' And at these words, he who had murdered Yahia and the Barmecides wept."

Whatever chapter of history we open, some text of alarm strikes our eye. Europe shares the terrors of Asia. In the noble words of Raleigh, "Death, which hateth and destroyeth a man, is believed; God, which hath made him and loves him, is always deferred." But conscience, chilled by the stealing shadow, tosses on its bed. Charles the Fifth unclutches Navarre; and the remembered blood of martyrs drops heavily—the warning of the storm—upon the pillow of Francis.

XXI

HOME-VIEWS OF HISTORY— BIOGRAPHY

HISTORY is a great painter, with the world for a canvas, and life for a figure. It displays man in his pride, and nature in her magnificence—Jerusalem bleeding under the Roman, or Lisbon vanishing in flame and earthquake. History must be splendid. Bacon called it the pomp of business. Its march is in high places, and along the “pinnacles and points of great affairs.” The extent and brilliancy of the picture render the execution difficult and unsatisfactory. The historian cannot isolate a hero, or a saint. The contagion of some infamous example infects his narrative. The impudent stare of a Castlemaine confronts a Barrow. Sir Thomas Browne had this inconvenience in his thoughts, when he complained that history sets down things which ought never to have been done, or never to have been known, and suggested the advantage of choosing

noble patterns from among different nations. Such a choice makes biography, of which Fuller has sketched a happy outline, declaring its proper aim and task to consist in—(1) gaining some glory to God; (2) preserving the memory of the dead; (3) holding forth examples to the living; (4) and furnishing entertainment to the reader.

The last quality gives to biography the most attractive shape of instruction. The voyage and the journey of life are related with every variety of accidents, shipwrecks, and escapes. Biography is the home-view of history, as it gives the history of manners. It is Washington in his corn-fields at Mount Vernon; or Pitt sowing the fragmentary opera-hat in the garden. "For my own part," is the confession of Dryden, referring to history, in which he included biography, "who must confess it to my shame, that I never read anything but for pleasure, it has always been the most delightful entertainment of my life." The same passion was pleasantly manifested in the Danish poet, Oehlenschläger, who, when a boy, and leading his father's choir at church, listened eagerly to the lessons of the day, but disappeared behind the organ at the first hint of the divided sermon.

Plutarch, by the general consent of criticism, is the representative of popular biography. He has three of Fuller's distinctive notes very largely developed; nor, according to his measure of knowledge and light, is he wanting in the religious element. A rhymist of a former day asserts his claim to our admiration and regard:

“ O blest Biography ! thy charms of yore
Historic Truth to strong affection bore ;
And fostering Virtue gave thee, as thy dower,
Of both thy parents the attractive power
To win the heart, the wavering thought to fix,
And fond delight with wise instruction mix.
First of thy votaries, peerless and alone,
Thy PLUTARCH shines, by moral beauty known ;
Enchanting Sage ; whose living lessons teach
What heights of Virtue human efforts reach.”

Plutarch stands between the historian, the poet, and the romancer, and catches beautiful lights from all. His account of Theseus resembles a legend from an old chronicle, or a chapter of magic. He indicates his theory of composition at the beginning of “Alexander,” where he observes that the virtues or the vices of men are not always seen best in their most distinguished, or notorious exploits; but that oftentimes an indif-

ferent action, a short saying, or a ready jest, opens more intricacies of the true character than a siege, or a battle. He supports his argument by the practice of painters, who bestow their chief labour on the face and eyes of the sitter, and run over other parts of the picture with a hastier brush. In like manner the biographer, whose books are portraits, is recommended to copy with diligence the features of the mind. The detail and circumstances of a scholar's industry, or a politician's plot, he can touch in a broad outline, or leave to historical inquirers.

Plutarch's *Lives* recall Titian's portraits. He shows the face of a hero, or a philosopher, in the glow or the shadows of thought and motion. His individuality is never hard. He causes the representation of character to help the attainment of a general and striking effect. His memoirs are the picturesque of biography. Reading becomes sight as some vivid touch animates and fixes the scene. Cæsar in the Senate House, surrounded by conspirators, and turning his face in every direction, meets only the gleam of steel; Pyrrhus, wounded and faint, suddenly opens his eyes on Zopyrus, in the act of waving a sword over his neck, and darts at him so fierce a look, that he

springs back in terror, and his hands tremble; on another occasion, the white charger of Sylla, lashed by a servant who saw his danger, carries the rider with a plunge between two falling spears.

The slight circumstances of Plutarch are not mere anecdotes, inserted for the sake of amusement. They are traits of feeling and disposition; short lines from a page of the heart put into italics. Homer is not more pleasantly natural. He tells us of his little girl, and her anxiety that her dolls might share in the attentions of the nurse. One stroke of the pen identifies Agesilaus. Returning from the victory of Chæronea, he makes no alteration in his furniture, or establishment, and wishes his daughter to be contented with her plain wooden carriage. We have all the wilfulness of Cleopatra epitomised, when, to avoid discovery, she rolls herself in a carpet, and, being carefully tied up at full length, is delivered in the dusk of the evening, like a large parcel, at the palace of Cæsar.

Occasionally he introduces little views of fields and gardens, which are extremely agreeable. When Lucullus, abandoning his Parthian expedition, marched in the middle of summer against

Tigranes, and had gained the summit of Mount Taurus, he saw with wonder that the corn was still green. At a later season, his soldiers were wetted every day in the narrow woody roads, by snow that fell on them from the trees.

The charm of Plutarch has allured many imitators. In modern times, Vasari breathed into the histories of painters the engaging simplicity and freshness of the Greek. We seem to listen to the masters whom he describes, and find the exclamation of Lanzi upon our tongue. It was thus that Raffaello and Andrea taught their scholars, and the sharp, quick sentence flashed from the lips of Buonarotti. It is true that the reputation of Vasari has been built up by scholarly hands. He enjoyed the aid which Reynolds was accused of concealing, and had his Johnson in a Camalduline monk.

Hume wished Robertson to adopt this familiar kind of history, and make Plutarch his model for a series of modern lives. Avoiding disquisition, the characters of celebrated persons were to be illustrated by domestic anecdotes, striking observations, and a general sketch of their employments. Hume also turned the eye of his friend upon the little groups of inferior actors, with

faces more or less known, whom, in his happy phrase, we meet in the corners of history.

The proposal was ingenious, as it showed the way to fill a gallery with portraits of discoverers, statesmen, artists, and men of letters. The annals of an age would be combined in a single view; while the reader, standing in the open field, and overlooking the barren places, might gather all the flowers, and make everything good and pleasant his own.

The least interesting form of biography is the political. A life of Walpole is a prolonged record of the wrangling of party. Who cares for Harley, except as the friend of Pope? The lives of soldiers are scarcely more satisfactory. The incidents are sorrows; and only in rare cases, as in the British struggle with Napoleon, is the sympathy of the reader justly awakened. We must wade over a thousand dreary chapters of ambition and blood, before the leaf opens upon Waterloo or Corunna. The sea is fruitfuller of instruction; and Nelson and Collingwood supply manuals of patriotism. The hardships of the sailor bring out another instance of Johnson's waywardness. Cook's voyages had just appeared, and, pointing to them, he exclaimed, "A man had better work his way be-

fore the mast, than read these through. There can be no entertainment in such books." Yet a voyage, which is only a life upon water, seems to possess that variety of daring and escape which common lives want. Its reality is romance. The sufferings of Anson live with the faëry tale of childhood, and the battered ship still drops to anchor with its ghastly crew, before the green and happy Island. The story of La Pérouse is a scene of tragedy that touches other hearts, besides that of the poet who said—

" His pages had a zest

More sweet than fiction to my wondering breast,
When, rapt in fancy, many a boyish day
I tracked his wanderings o'er the watery way.

" He came not back—Conjecture's cheek grew pale,
Year after year in no propitious gale,
His lilied banner held its homeward way,
And Science saddened at her Martyr's stay."

Biography, exclusively serious, or devotional, contains many elements of beauty. The sequestered teacher, the zealous missionary, and the glorified martyr, have distinctive features of sublimity and tenderness. How curious is our sensation in closing an account of Marlborough, or Richelieu, and taking up the gentle portraitures

of Walton. It is like being suddenly carried from the Thames, between London and Greenwich, rocking its stately ships, and lined by busy wharves, into the pastoral Wye, with its green farms, and the solemn ruins of God's house. Compare a splendid saloon in Paris with the holy scene in the old palace of Salisbury, where we behold

. "The trusty staff that Jewel gave
To youthful Hooker, in familiar style
The gift exalting, and with playful smile."

The panegyric once spoken of a departed saint is true of every other; and if an age be evil and deserve him not, it is the more needful to have such lives preserved in memory, to instruct our piety, or upbraid our sins. "And so, after the tree of Paradise has been cut down, the dead trunk may help to uphold the falling temple, or kindle a fire upon the altar."

The history of men of science has one peculiar advantage, as it shows the importance of little things in producing great results. Smeaton learned his principle of constructing a lighthouse, by noticing the trunk of a tree to be diminished from a curve to a cylinder; Rembrandt's marvellous system of splendour and shade was suggested

by accidental gleams of light in his father's mill; White, of Selborne, carrying about in his rides and walks a list of birds to be investigated, and Newton, turning an old box into a water-clock, or the yard of a house into a sun-dial, are examples of those habits of patient observation which biography attractively recommends.

But the annals of pure literature afford the highest gratification, whether the subject be a poet, philosopher, or that refined inquirer after beauty and wisdom who passes under the universal name of scholar. It was the belief of Johnson that no literary life in England had been well written. The gorgeous tale of genius is always half told. Time, which destroys its memorials, enlarges its lustre. It is only since biography and letters are convertible into gold, that the contemporaries of famous men preserve and publish the sayings of the departed. How we might have rejoiced if Occleve, instead of prefixing to a manuscript a portrait of Chaucer, had given a few recollections of the poet himself, and fragments of his table-talk about the Pilgrimage to Canterbury; or if Ben Jonson, who survived Shakespeare twenty-one years, had presented to the world a short review of his friend's festive evenings! But

the age made no sign when its noblest son passed away. The birth, the marriage, the authorship, and the retirement of Shakespeare composed his biography. If we seek for news of prejudices, infirmities, charity, and love, it is found in his verses alone. Deep is the sigh of taste for lost treasures, whether it muses upon the sweet, serious conversation of Spenser, the gilded current of Hooker's thoughtfulness, the variegated wisdom of Milton, the magnificent explorings of Bacon, or the paradisaical dreams of Taylor. Few footprints remain on the sand before the ever-flowing tide. Long ago it washed out Homer's. Curiosity follows him in vain. Greece and Asia perplex us with a rival Stratford-upon-Avon. The rank of Aristophanes is only conjectured from his gift to two poor players of Athens. Of every country and season the complaint is felt and uttered. Precious would be the journal by a Florentine Defoe of the indoor occupations of Dante. Think of beholding, as in a clear glass, Macchiavelli living along the lines of his political web; Galileo watching the moon plough her way across the clouds; or Tasso, with Polybius in his hand, marshalling the knights of Godfrey.

The most delightful life is that which a loving

friend or admirer composes from his own recollections. Boswell's *Johnson* is the model and the masterpiece. In a humbler way, Roger North's account of the Lordkeeper Guildford and his two brothers is admirable for its dramatic truth and character. Of one of these, a Turkish merchant, who returned to England in the reign of Charles the Second, he has left a sketch so lively and particular, that we seem to have lived in the same house. We accompany him to Bridewell, and mark his trepidation at the turnkey with the gruff voice, who recalled the alarming "Chiaus" of Constantinople; we hold our breath at his daring adventure in the tower of Bow Church, when he swung his corpulent body round the column; or take his arm to St. Paul's, on Saturdays, when Sir Christopher Wren was there, to have "a snatch of discourse" about the building.

The account of Wolsey by Cavendish has the same truthfulness and reality. It is a picture-book done by the pen. What a breathing, moving panorama is the Cardinal's day! The two "masses" being over, he comes from his chamber about eight of the clock, all in red, with an upper garment of taffety, or most commonly of fine crimson satin engrained; his tippet of sables is

round his neck, and in his hand he carries the mysterious orange, full of aromatic sponge, and anxiously held to the nose when the throng presses him, or a suitor grows troublesome. Not a feature of the procession is lost. We see the princely "hat" borne by a gentleman of worship "right solemnly"; his mule with scarlet pillion and gilt stirrups; his cross-bearers on great horses; his train of noblemen and chivalry; and his four footmen, bearing burnished pole-axes that catch the sun. And so the king's favourite rides to the door of Westminster Hall. No limner, in the monastic shade, hung more fondly over his illuminated saint, than the gentleman-usher of Wolsey upon the lineaments of his Cardinal. And sweet Lucy Hutchinson bids us not to forget the biography of affection.

Whether much or little be known of great men, no secrets should be kept, nor false things be told. Biography is useless which is not true. Let the weaknesses of character be preserved, however insignificant or humbling. The jest-book of Tacitus, the medicated drinks of Bacon, the extempore rhymes of Cheselden, the preparatory violin of Bourdaloue, and the fancy-lighting damsons of Dryden, have their place and value. They

are the errata of genius, and clear up the text. A French mathematician had pleasant doubts concerning the animal wants of Newton, and was disposed to regard him as an intellectual being, in whom the mind's flame had absorbed each grosser particle. It is a precipitous fall from dividing a ray of light, or writing *Comus*, to weariness and dinner. But biography admonishes pride, when it displays Salmasius, the champion of kings, shivering under the eye and scourge of his wife; or stops us at the door of Milton's academy, to hear the scream and the ferule. It steals on the poet and the premier unawares—Cowley in dressing-gown and slippers, and Cecil with his Treasurer's robe on the chair.

The works of an author are not always evidence for the biographer, because talent has a professional temper which it manifests in type, or colours. Watteau was only gay in a landscape, and Young was cheerful without his pen. A delicate judgment distinguishes the natural from the artistic frame of thought; and in numberless instances the book or the picture is a commentary on the mind that produced it, and corrects a false opinion of character and endowments. Walton imagined Hooker to have been simple and childlike in

worldly affairs; whereas the *Polity* shows an acute observer of mankind, and a vein of strong and quiet humour flowing through the learned argument.

When a man relates his own life, we call it an autobiography. These portraits may be captivating, but can seldom be trusted. The composer unconsciously, or by design, softens the harsh feature, or an unpleasing expression. His *ideal* of excellence answers the purposes of a painter's lay-figure. He disposes and dresses it in favourable lights and rich draperies. Such a person resembles Prior giving his picture to St. John's in a brocaded suit. A vice, or a bad custom, strongly marked and decided, is shaded off into a neutral tint. How amusing is Clarendon's vindication of his appetite, when, speaking in the third person, he says: "He indulged his palate very much, and even took some delight in eating and drinking, but without any approach to luxury." In Browne's singular piece of mind-painting, the same delusion is conspicuous, and throws a doubtfulness over the whole. It is the physician's likeness drawn by himself, and presented to posterity. The mightier the writer, the more his tale will be suspected. It was hinted by Cæsar's enemies

that his *Commentaries*, which are a chapter of autobiography, would have been longer if he had inserted his defeats.

“To converse with historians,” was a remark of Bolingbroke, “is to keep good company; many of them were excellent men, and those who were not such, have taken care to appear so in their writings.” Look at Sallust drawn by himself, and compare the portrait with that which his contemporaries painted. The statesman, whose delicate conscience shrank from the suspicion of fraud, was expelled the Senate for personal depravity; and the stern advocate of justice was known to have adorned his palace with the plunder of his grinding government in Numidia. The expulsion has been questioned, but the African atrocities are acknowledged. It is a hard task to keep the eyes clear, when the artist colours and lights the transparency, and puts his figure gracefully in the centre.

Notwithstanding its defects, personal narrative is always entertaining. No style admits so many trifles; moreover, self-describers are generally on good terms with themselves, and amuse us, in spite of our contempt. To this class belongs Colley Cibber’s *Apology*, which is the elaborate

miniature of a gossip. Cellini's mood is higher and darker. He opens his mind to the public gaze, and records with imperturbable tranquillity the symptoms of its disease and its health. We see him in every posture of debasement; abandoned, and superstitious; a scorner of the ignorant, and a believer in magic; passing, by one step, from a brutal insult to a religious sonnet, and fighting a duel with his eye upon Providence.

The scholar's story is told by Huet, Bishop of avranches. The order never had an able representative. Of noble descent, he lost his parents in childhood, and fought his way to learning through all the ingenuity of persecution. His schoolfellows stole his books, tore his papers, or wetted them until the ink ran. During play-time they barred up his door; to enjoy a quiet hour of study he rose with the sun, while his tormentors were asleep, or hid himself in the thick shade of the wood. But his efforts were unsuccessful. His companions hunted the recluse among the bushes, and drove him from his concealment. At length he became his own master, and the hill of knowledge and fame was rapidly climbed. From the age of twenty almost up to ninety years, he pursued his studies with a vigour

that no labour could subdue. Langour was unknown to his iron nerves. After six or seven hours spent in mental toil, he cheerfully closed his books, singing to himself, and ready and eager for a new encounter.

We owe these slighter touches of self-portraiture to the form of composition which Huet selected. A grave historian would have hesitated to relate the prodigies of fencing, jumping, and muscular strength which he appears to have esteemed, as Johnson exulted in his "seat" after hounds. But as the individual record of perseverance and learning, the story of Huet is invaluable. What age will behold another scholar to whom astronomy and Greek were equally easy? who dissected with his own hand three hundred eyes, and edited the Delphin Classics?

Occasionally a poet weaves into his verse the experiences and the delights of his early or later life. Few threads give more beauty to the web. The first canto of the *Minstrel* is an interesting example, and shows how the heart of Beattie throbs in the breast of Edwin; while the grassy turf,

"With here and there a violet bestrown,"

the woody glen, the murmuring brook, the boughs

rustled by the owl, the breezy down, and the misty hill clearing before the sun—are only so many reflections of Laurencekirk, and the lonely hamlet of Fordoun. Collins resembles Beattie. Each ode is an episode of his inner life displayed in colours. When the poet speaks without concealment in his own person, the biographical surprise is still more grateful. Cowper illustrates the reality, as Beattie shows the allegory. Who does not love his remembered walk

“Ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme?”

or the confession of his impatience, in the winter evenings, to open the “folio of four pages,” which

“The herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,
News from all nations lumbering at his back,”

had just dropped at the inn-door. And Akenside wrote few passages so tender and pleasing as the lines, in which he throws a backward glance of pensive regret, upon the youthful hours passed at Morpeth:

“O ye Northumbrian shades, which overlook
The rocky pavement and the mossy falls
Of solitary Wensbeck’s limpid stream,
How gladly I recall your well-known seats,
Beloved of old; and that delightful time,

When all alone, for many a summer's day,
I wandered through your calm recesses, led
In silence, by some powerful hand unseen."

In our day, the poetry of Wordsworth has carried the biographical style to its utmost boundary.

Sometimes autobiography takes the tone of confessions, as in the penitential gloom of Augustine, and the melodrama of Rousseau. Frequently it flows into the short entries of the journal. The *Diary* of Pepys is the whole inner man under a microscope. He compels us to despise him, eating "in silver plates," or "driving in his own coach through Hyde Park," with his "new liveries of serge, and the horses' manes and tails tied with red ribbons." To be sure the good gentleman wrote in cipher; but did he not, when his eyes failed him, resolve to have the journal kept by his people in long-hand?

Letters are acknowledged memoirs of Self. Horace Walpole's correspondence inlays his mind in mosaic. The epistolary style is always artificial. The opening of the heart to a friend is one of the fables of the Golden Age. Even Cowper had a tinge for his cousin. What a despiser of verses was Pope by the *Post*! But the frozen house-keeper of Lord Oxford would have told a different

story when, in one winter night of the terrible "Forty," she answered the impatient poet's fourth bell for a sheet of paper.

From the lessons of biography four may be chosen. It suggests a comparison between the difficulties of earlier and later readers:

" On shelf of deal, beside the cuckoo-clock,
Of cottage-reading rests the chosen stock,"

which might have bewildered by its luxury a divine of 1300. The Greek sage had few aids. Plato devoted three hundred pounds to the purchase of three books of a distinguished Pythagorean; and Aristotle invested twice that sum in the small library of a deceased philosopher. Jerome nearly ruined himself to procure the works of Origen; and Leo bartered five hundred pieces of gold for five books of Tacitus. The biographer may moralise on the pen he holds. Petrarch being at Liege, in the earlier half of the fourteenth century, and anxious to copy two speeches of Cicero, with difficulty obtained a few drops of ink as yellow as saffron.

Biography cheers merit when its hopes are drooping. It leads the student down a gallery of portraits, and gives the comforting or warning history of each. It shows Jackson working on his

father's shop-board, and cherishing a love for art by a visit to Castle Howard; Richardson, a printer's apprentice, stealing an hour from sleep to improve his mind, and scrupulously buying his own candle, that his master might not be defrauded; or the Chinese scholar Morrison, labouring at his trade of a last and boot maker, and keeping his lamp from blowing out with a volume of Matthew Henry's *Commentary*.

Occasionally one incident in the life of a remarkable person contains the most profitable instruction. Prior, on the death of his father, was sent to Westminster School, which he left to assist his uncle, a vintner at Charing Cross. He remembered Busby, and made Horace the companion of his leisure. The Latin poet was to be the key of his fortunes. The Rummer Tavern was the club of the nobility, and numbered among its visitors the celebrated Lord Dorset, to whom Dryden addressed his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, and who, before he grew fat and nervous, was the gayest converser of that sparkling age. Upon one occasion he found the vintner's nephew reading Horace. A different version of the story is given, but with the same result. He expressed his interest in the young man's welfare, and under-

took the care of his education. Cambridge air ripened his powers. He rose to political renown, maintained at Versailles his reputation for wit, and returning to England drew from Swift the announcement, "Prior is come over from France for a few days; *Stocks rise at his coming.*"

Biography turns our eyes from the present to the future. In life, Gorgias may be more applauded than Plato, and Salieri snatch the reward from Mozart. Years bring the change and the recompense. The statue follows the hemlock of Phocion; and the chair of Boccaccio is raised over the ashes of Dante. A picture, for which Wilkie, in his early London life, received fifteen guineas, was recently sold for eight hundred. Biography is the application of history to the heart, and its finest fruit is patience. He who strives to make himself different from other men by much reading is justly said to gain this advantage, that in ill fortune he has something left of entertainment and comfort.

The grandest lesson of biography is the need of moral and religious principle. This is the burden of all its music. Stop for a moment before that youthful face, which shoots such a fitful brightness from its proud, visionary eyes. It is the

portrait of Chatterton. Begin with his childhood. At six years of age he did not know A; he spent the same number of months in reaching P. Prior's plan of alluring the scholar with gingerbread letters, to be eaten as they are learned, might have failed. Suddenly a spark dropped on the cold mind. His mother tore up an old music-book for waste paper, and the painted capitals caught his eye. She said that he fell in love with the manuscript. A black-letter Bible completed the conquest of the dunce. He awoke like the giant, devouring books with unsatisfied hunger.

His temptation grew with his intellect. A manufacturer requested him to choose a device, or inscription, for a cup. "Paint me," answered the boy, "an angel with wings and a trumpet, to trumpet my name over the world." It was Milton's daring without his prayer. The tempter of Chatterton was pride. One of his latest letters is still preserved, in which the terrible workings of an ungoverned spirit is shown by the emphasis of his pen. "It is my PRIDE, my native, unconquerable pride, that plunges me into distraction. You must know that nineteen twentieths of my composition is pride. I must either live a slave, or a servant—to have no will of my own, no senti-

ments of my own, which I may freely declare as such—or DIE.”

It is quite conceivable that a boy-genius, overflowing with mirthful strength, might banter a pompous pewterer by a Norman pedigree, or a dull topographer with a castle in the clouds. But Chatterton had a baser motive. The pride that enslaved his soul at Bristol, drove him to London. Its bondage became fiercer. One after another his home-thoughts and recollections are whirled away, like spring blossoms in a hurricane. The black-letter Bible is lost in shadow. Mother, and sisters, and the gifts of love, disappear. Only pride remains. John Foster has some striking and affecting observations on the last days of Chatterton: “The ambition, flushed with confidence, had turned to insupportable mortification; the last expedient was brought, as by some demon, directly before him; and so eventful, wayward, ill-disciplined, unhonoured, but eminently capable a life was terminated at a little short of the age of eighteen; of which the last few months must have hurried him through a violent tumult of the passions. And all this anarchy of emotions, the action and re-action of pride, exultation, resentment, and despair, the confusion, and conflict of

all the passions, to close in the self-destruction of their slave and victim!" We see the "marvellous boy" for the last time retire to his dreary chamber, with the dreadful remedy for hunger and pride; we watch him take it up and lay it down again, "with a shuddering sensation, for the power of death is there." He collects his fragments of verse and prose; tears them in pieces; mingles the poison; swallows it, and plunges over the ghastly precipice in sullen, tempestuous, magnificent despair.

O words to be graven in gold!

"Woe be to the youthful poet who sets out upon his pilgrimage to the Temple of Fame, with nothing but hope for his viaticum! There is the Slough of Despond, and the Hill of Difficulty, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death upon the Way."

XXII

LITERATURE OF THE PULPIT

WHEN Beauclerk's books were sold, Wilkes expressed his astonishment at finding so large a collection of sermons in the library of a fashionable scholar. Johnson said, "Why, sir, you are to remember that sermons make a considerable branch of English literature." The caution might be widely spread. In every Christian land the learned mind has poured its choicest gifts into theology. Chrysostom warms the fourth century like a sun. The discourses of St. Bernard are shining lights in dark ages. Dante, whom he preceded by more than a hundred years, caught no views of Paradise from the mountain-top more fruitful or serene. If we turn our eyes to France, Bossuet is her grandest poet, and Pascal eclipses Montesquieu.

The gloomy recess of an ecclesiastical library is like a harbour, into which a far-travelling curiosity has sailed with its freight, and cast anchor. The ponderous tomes are bales of the mind's merchandise. Odours of distant countries steal from

the red leaves, the swelling ridges of vellum, and the titles in tarnished gold. Davenant's description of their covers sprinkled with dust, and long streets of spiders' webs, is striking as the lesson it gives is significant.

These are the controversies and the speculations of the Schoolmen, and would scarcely be found on the shelves of Beauclerk. But the elder rhetoric, which had taken the shape of exhortation, abounds in elements of interest and materials of deep or bright thinking, which the polite reader may separate from the text. Each volume is a commonplace book of brilliant sayings and erudite allusions; a treasure-house of products and antiquities from every climate and age of intellect. Here are gathered, without much attempt at order or classification, battered armour of Homeric chiefs, dry chips of Seneca, poisoned arrows of Juvenal, magical flutes of Apuleius, grotesque words coined by that great minter, Tertullian, and spiritual clothing of wrought gold from Chrysostom. He who seeks for amusement finds it in old sermons. The slightest circumstances of ancient and modern life are preserved; from the vermilion cord with which the public officer pursued and marked the Athenians who neglected

the Assemblies, to the first appearance of the umbrella in London.

The preachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are its familiar historians. Latimer opens the royal kitchen. Andrewes leads common life into the sun. We learn from Donne how street-begging had become a trade in 1625. Parents educated their children for it, and expert professors of the art received apprentices, whom they perfected in making a face and a story. Perhaps the English preacher caught this habit of sketching manners from Chrysostom, in whose homilies we obtain so many lively views of Constantinople and Antioch; who, in enforcing the study of the Scriptures, dissuades parents from hanging the Gospels round the neck of a child, or near the bed, as a charm; and condemns the rich for using dice every day, and keeping their sumptuous Bibles shut up in the cases.

During two hundred years, the sermon shaped and nourished the English mind. Greek and Latin fountains of philosophy and grace flowed into poetry from the pulpit. Shakespeare might have picked up crumbs of Plato and Euripides from the orator of Paul's Cross. The Preacher had a religious and instructive character. He

entertained that he might improve the hearer. He unfolded the grandeur of a prophecy, or the comfort of an epistle, and alarmed the conscience, or bound up a wounded heart; he brought tidings of foreign learning to the scholar, of discoveries to the naturalist, and of manners to the people; and thus he won the ears of the thoughtful, the inquisitive, and the idle.

The sermon reflected the research, the feelings, and the experience of the speaker. The reading of a week slipped into a parenthesis. If Donne sets forth the praises of devout women in the morning of Christianity, he remembers a Venetian story about the matrons who were sent to propitiate an empress. In showing that sin separates a man from God, he tells the congregation of his own visit to Aix-la-Chapelle for the sake of the baths, and how the house he lodged in—big enough for a small parish—was occupied by swarms of Anabaptists, who agreed in nothing but keeping apart from one another; the father excommunicating the son on the third floor, and the uncle his nephew in the attic.

Amusement is only the accident of our early eloquence. In devotion, learning, argument, and imagination, it is unequalled. It comes warm

from the Bible. The irradiated mind shoots a glory into the commonest word, and Christian duties are drawn with so much patience of love and embellishment, that later pens seem to produce faint and imperfect copies. Mr. Keble illustrates one of his poems by a passage from Miller's *Bampton Lectures*; but it will be seen that the comparison had been employed two centuries before by Donne, and at a later period by Seed. Its last appearance is in a discourse of Mr. Melvill:

THE EYE OF THE PORTRAIT

MILLER

"The point worthy of observation is, to note how a book of the description and compass which we have represented Scripture to be, possesses this versatility of power: this eye, like that of a portrait, uniformly fixed upon us, turn where we will."

SEED

"When the discourse is directed to us, lending a favourable attention, and making pertinent replies; like a fine picture which seems to fix an eye upon, and direct its views to each person in the room, who looks upon it, and eyes it attentively."

DONNE

"Be, therefore, no stranger to this face; see Him here that you may know Him, and He you there; and then, as a picture looks upon him who looks upon it, God, upon whom thou keepest thine eye, will keep His eye upon thee."

MELVILL

"Such is your nature that, without constant vigilance, the direction may be gradually changed, and yet appear to you the same, even as the eyes of a well-drawn portrait follow you as you move, and so might persuade you that you had not moved at all."

The thought, indeed, may be found in a lighter page. When Colonel Everard revisited the parlour in Woodstock Lodge, where the old portrait of Victor Lee was suspended, "he remembered how . . . when left alone in the apartment, the searching eye of the old warrior *seemed always bent upon his, in whatever part of the room he placed himself.*"

Read one more example from a preacher of the Elizabethan age, and of the present:

OLD CHURCHES

HENRY SMITH

"This is our life; while we enjoy it, we lose it like the sun, which flies swifter than the arrow, and yet no man perceives that it moves. He which lasted 900 years could not hold out one hour longer; and what is he now more than a child that lived but a year? Where are they which founded this goodly city? which possessed these fair houses, and walked in these pleasant fields; which entered these stately temples; which kneeled in these seats; which preached out of this place but thirty years ago? Is not earth turned to earth, and shall not our sun set like theirs when the night comes?"

BRADLEY

"Even the works of our own hands remain much longer than we. The pyramids of Egypt have defied the attacks of 3000 years, while their builders sank, perhaps, under the burden of fourscore. Our houses stand long after their transient proprietors are gone, and their names forgotten. Where is now the head that planned, and the hand which built this house of God? They were all reduced to ashes 500 years ago. The very seats we sit on have borne generations before they bore us, and will probably bear many after us. Th remains of those who once occupied the places we now fill are underneath our feet."

I do not accuse the moderns of wilfully defrauding the ancients. The resemblances may be unintentional. The object of the parallel is to urge the diligent study of our ancestors in divinity. The antique legend, which gave the sweetest song to nightingales that built their nests near the tomb of Orpheus, may have a moral for prose.

The elaborateness of the early style was not felt to be wearisome. Hearers and readers in 1600 were seldom in a hurry. But now and then rambling through the reigns of Elizabeth and James, or of the first and second Charles, we overtake a loitering expounder, who has a large gift of tediousness, and might have assisted the German professor in his course of lectures upon the first chapter of Isaiah, which extended over twenty years, and was left unfinished. In the true masters of theological eloquence, however, the wandering and scattered utterance had, generally, intention and method. They spread out their thoughts and images, as a skilful general invests a strong fortress with troops; and threw reasoning into a circle, to besiege a hostile argument and cut off escape. Milton's definition is realised. The words in "well-ordered files fall aptly into their places." Similes and metaphors

are rarely ornamental figures, mere combatants on a rhetorical parade, with music and standards for show. They carry weapons, and are ready for action.

The epoch of elegance had not arrived, and the eye of taste discovers many violations of its laws; but the most objectionable fault is the mixture of spiritual and worldly things; as in continental cities a shop is encrusted on a cathedral. South is a notable offender. He writes a political note on a Gospel, and couples Cromwell and Peter in a sentence. Much of this familiarity may be traced to the Miracle-play, which had left a popular impression behind it. Statesmen and Prelates were scarcely alive to the discord: in the first edition of the Bishops' Bible the portrait of Leicester was prefixed to Joshua; and, in 1754, the arms of the Primate Parker replaced Burleigh as a decoration of the Psalms.

In whatever light we examine it, the sermon of the seventeenth century continues to be a problem of literature. It flourished in ignorance and withered under education. The "plain" manner came in with the national school. Day by day, the jewels of the breastplate were more clouded, and the superb scenery of truth was buried deeper

in snow. The public mind has taken the tone of its teachers. Sublimity is darkness, and the glow of the prophet is a poetical turn. Imagine Donne re-appearing in the chapel of Lincoln's Inn with one of the discourses which he delivered to the society of 1618. Let him exhibit, in all its fullness, that manifold style which was the delight of his friends and of the crowd; the imperial logic, the gorgeous perspective of imagery, the poem in a word, the melting pathos, the rapturous piety, and the splendour of language that flowed over the argument and adorned it, like a crimson mantle upon armour. Picture the uneasy rustle of the benchers, and the bewilderment of the verger.

Why should "sleep" and "sermon" be accepted as synonyms by the vulgar? A judge and a master recommended Demosthenes to the village preacher. Surely, any style is better than that which is plain in the absence of expression, and simple in having no thoughts to convey. Is it surprising if the dead masses slumber under such appeals? The fervour of the old eloquence is needed to strike heat into the sinner. His cure is to be wrought by no servile hand. Gehazi might have laid Elisha's staff for ever upon the Shunammite's child. The eyes open only to the

prophet's call. The kindled lips of inspired genius must breathe over the benumbed soul before the colour of health will return, the baptismal flame be fanned into warmth, and the son of the church be delivered to his mother.

XXIII

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS DELIGHTS

IT was a remark of Bacon, that knowledge resembles a tree which runs straight for some time, and then parts itself into branches. Of these, philosophy is one of the most verdurous, and throws the broadest shadow; whether we regard it in relation to spiritual truth, and call it divine, or to the phenomena of the visible world, and distinguish it as natural, or to the feelings and powers of men, and show its restricted application by the title of human, or moral.

Philosophy comes into this discourse under its single aspect of lighting and adorning the thoughts. It is only wisdom, with the girdle of beauty, that belongs to our subject. Speculative theories are left in their barren splendour. Ingenious researches, which obtain the name of metaphysical, offer few lasting rewards, or give much present gratification. "I have not," Gray said, "the eyes of a cat, so cannot see in the dark."

Exploring expeditions into the mind generally bring back fabulous news of the interior. The perplexed journey is made by twilight, and the dim impressions of the traveller become obscurer in their transmission. He seldom sees an object with sufficient distinctness to describe it. The question remains undetermined, if ideas be in-born, as one observer affirms, or fragments of broken sensations, as another supposes, or fine chains coiled up in the brain, as they appeared to the inquisitive eye of a third.

The student, therefore, who is enamoured of the graces of learning, turns to authors who entertain his eye and feed his fancy with the loveliest pictures and the richest fruit. For this reason he is never weary of reading particular passages in Plato; such as the allegory which compares the soul to a chariot with winged horses and a driver, and resolves its purest thoughts into remembrances of a brighter life in a nobler society. He learns a solemn and almost a Christian moral from the suggestion, that the soul of a philosopher will recover its lost grandeur the sooner, because, in a fallen and dark condition, it ever tries to recollect the things which higher intelligences contemplate. An understanding, thus taught

and illuminated, finds its eyesight cleared and strengthened. The earth on which it dwells is known to be Eden under a mist; in the common flower of the hedge, the painted clouds, and the sunshine on the grass, it reads intimations of a better country—

“Of all that is most beauteous, imaged there
 In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
 An ample ether, a diviner air,
 And fields invested with purpleal gleams.”

Such a reader is greatly charmed by the manner in which wisdom is communicated. Gilpin compared a true philosophical style to light from a north window, strong but clear. The colourless depth of the Greek has the transparent freshness, without being cold; and a ray of imagination seems continually to pierce and warm it. To the latest hour of his life, Plato polished and adjusted his illustrations and argument; in the significant commentary of an early critic, combing and curling, and weaving and unweaving his writings after a variety of fashions.

Our own literature contains many lofty and serious views of the mysteries of man's nature. In these the student may

“ At intervals descry

Gleams of the glory, streaks of flowing light,
Openings of heaven.”

Cudworth is studied with pleasure and profit for the frequent majesty of his sentiments; Henry More, for the wild strains of a tender and musical fancy; Norris, for a serious Platonism, brightened by a heavenly sunshine; and Berkeley, for unequalled grace and harmony in manner. The system of Wollaston is mutilated on one side, but his moral dignity and deep sense of immortality lend impression to his teaching. It is unnecessary to speak of Butler, who, in the walk which he chose, is as incomparable as Hooker.

Philosophical studies are beset by one peril,—a person easily brings himself to think that he thinks; and a smattering of science encourages conceit. He is above his companions. A hieroglyphic is a spell. Moreover, the vain man is generally a doubter. It is a Newton who sees himself in a child on the seashore, and his discoveries in the coloured shells. A little knowledge leads a mind from God. Unripe thinkers use their learning to authenticate their doubts; while unbelief has its own dogma, more peremptory than the inquisitor's. Patient meditation brings

the scholar back to humbleness. He learns that the grandest truths appear slowly. They are like the shapes of cloudy light, floating in the uttermost loneliness of space; some the naked eye discerns, others a common glass brings into view. But it was the enormous reflector of modern skill, in the purity of a southern atmosphere, that gave to those masses of vapour a form and a look of glory, and kindled strips of mist into rays of exquisite lustre. Thus, the cloud of the weak becomes the star-cluster of the strengthened sight. Many radiant bodies yet remain in their majestic retirements. No glass, however endowed with vision, compels these shadows to come within its range, and to show their faces. Still there is hope. The discovery of one star is the promise of another. The hand of science grows more cunning every day, and its eye endures a stronger blaze. This is the lesson for the inquirer into the far-off and dim things of truth. Hour by hour some eyes are opened more and more by the Father of lights, to behold the wondrous things of His law. Nothing is too remote or misty for the straining and waiting gaze. The most awful mysteries seem to be drawn nearer, and to glimmer from behind the veil.

XXIV

THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES

FLEURY, after excepting Latin, Italian, and Spanish, for general readers, and Greek and Hebrew for ecclesiastics, includes foreign languages among the curiosities of literature. In English he found no advantage to compensate a learner. Selden puts the relative value of ancient and modern tongues with much archness, in comparing a person who quotes a Dutch, when a classical author might be used, to a guest leaving a party of scholars to solicit a testimonial from the kitchen.

The judgment of Fleury may fairly be questioned, but his omission of Oriental languages will not be disapproved. These mines are worked at enormous cost, and the returns are small. If Johnson's pension had come twenty years earlier, it would hardly have profited mankind in sending him, according to his wish, to Constantinople to learn Arabic. The rarity of such acquirements

imparts a fictitious importance. We regard a person who speaks Chinese fluently, as we might look at a traveller accustomed to take his morning walk along the Great Wall. A shadow from the Pyramids falls over Champollion.

Languages are voices of a nation's mind. The mountain Greek has no tone of the soft Ionic. The Anglo-Saxon casts abroad in its short, stern, and solemn words, the awfulness of the forests where it grew. Italian is the love-talk of the Roman without his armour. A most curious instance of a language shaped by climate is seen in the South Sea Islands; and we are told that whole chapters of the New Testament contain no words ending with consonants, except the proper names of the original.

Of course every new language is a new instrument of power. It was finely said by Bacon, that God has formed the mind of man like a mirror, capable of receiving the image of the whole world, the variety of things, and the changes of time. He, therefore, whose knowledge spreads into the amplest circle, possesses the largest glass. Each added acquirement is a shade melted from the surface. Every fresh dialect is a new picture brought under the eye. But no riches are without

inconveniences. Reflections of various objects overrun and confuse one another. The men of many tongues corrupt the idioms of their own language, by catching the accent of their companions. Dryden attributed most of Cowley's defects to his continental associations, and said that his losses at home out-balanced his gains from abroad. That hideous German-English, which infects our modern literature, may be thought to confirm the remark.

Another apprehension rises. The time which is devoted to a foreign writer must obviously be taken from a native. Some sense of sacrifice is felt in abandoning the fallen angel of Milton, with his face of "princely counsel,"

"Majestic though in ruins,"

for the demon of Tasso, and his long tail; Shakespeare ought to be nearly got by heart, before a summer afternoon is spent with Alfieri; and the theologian should enjoy very long days of study who leaves Henry Smith upon the shelf, to muse over Segneri. What glorious poetry and prose Schlegel neglected, while he read with lingering eyes all the forgotten verses of Boccaccio!

The first duty of a reader is to study the learn-

ing and intellect of his own country. Our English granaries will feed a long life. Bacon magnified "letters, which, as ships, pass through the vast sea of Time," and spread the treasures of one age over another. And we may carry out his illustration in the noble boast of the poet Young, that Bacon himself, and Newton, and Shakespeare, and Milton, have showed us how all the winds cannot blow a British ship farther, than true genius conveys British glory. These heroic names of wisdom and fancy go round the world, while every foreign rival strikes its flag as they pass.

Literature has pleasures like those of travel. No landscape preserves its bloom and colour out of its own light and air. It looks languid and dusty in a description, and must be seen to be enjoyed. The remark is not applicable to authors. Rarely even in prose is the writer's physiognomy reflected. Certainly no translation of a true poem can retain the beauty. It is a landscape transferred to the wood. Outline and grouping may be preserved, but colour and life escape. By what process of skill can the copyist present, in their full splendour, the epithets of St. Paul, the silvery lights of Livy, or the picture-words of

Æschylus? The weather-stains of Dante disappear in the modern fabric. The bloom of Petrarch melts under the touch. The hand rubs the polish from Massillon and Racine, and the crowded thoughtfulness of Pascal is scattered.

Another obstacle may be noticed to the success of the carefulest version,—a home-feeling generally injures the truth of a description. I am taught by the pencil-sketch of Twickenham, which Pope drew in the fly-leaf of his Homer. The trim grass-plot runs up to the door of Hector. The character of a poem and a history suffers from the same cause—the complexion and the garb are no longer national. Cato addresses the Senate in a wig, and Æneas, on the arm of Dryden, has the lounge of the Mall.

XXV

DOMESTIC INTERIORS OF LEARNING

THE Persian poet Saadi framed a lesson in a pleasant Apologue. Two friends spent a summer day in a garden of roses; one contented himself with the colours and fragrance, the other gathered the choicest bloom and carried it to his family. The happy home-life of genius is the moral of the story. Of many sons of learning it might be written:

“ Oh, bliss, when all in circle drawn
About him, heart and ear were fed
To hear him, as he lay and read
The Tuscan poets on the lawn.”

We overlook Richardson reading a chapter of a new novel to a select circle in his grotto; and Sterne never wears so attractive an expression as by his own fireside, while his daughter makes a fair manuscript, and his wife is busy with her needle. “I am scribbling away,” he tells a friend, “at my *Tristram*; these two volumes are, I think,

the best I shall write as long as I live. My Lydia helps to copy for me, and my wife knits and listens as I read her chapters."

The poetic hearth of Weston, with the sofa and the warm curtains, and the adventures of the traveller by land or water,

"by one made vocal
For the amusement of the rest,"

recalls the visitor who put the rose-leaves in his bosom. Nor should we forget Milton inviting a friend to waste a sullen day by the fire, cheered by a

"neat repast
Of Attic taste with wine, whence we may rise
To hear the lute well touch'd, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air."

And we breathe the Persian's rose again in Titian's garden-suppers, when the soft voices and instruments of Venetian ladies sounded from a thousand gondolas, gliding past in the moonlight.

A familiar letter of Pliny opens a domestic interior of a scholar seventeen hundred years ago. He was stirring with the dawn, and thinking gloom favourable to meditation, he had his chamber darkened. Such opposite tempers as

Malebranche, Hobbes, Corneille, and Sidney seem to have shared this partiality. The morning was Pliny's season of composition. Having arranged his subject, he called his secretary, who wrote from his dictation. A saunter on the terrace, or beneath a covered portico, and a short carriage-drive, heightened his enjoyment of a siesta; afterwards he took a longer walk, which he improved by repeating a Greek or Latin speech. Supper concluded the day with a book, music, or an interlude.

A graceful example is seen in a poet who borrowed Pliny's language. Petrarch lived in the rose-garden. His was the day of the true scholar, who found in Vaucluse a hermitage of fancy. Often he spent the hours from early morning in unbroken meditation, going forth to his work of taste until the evening. At other times his humour was rural, and he wandered among the leafy woods while his shadow lengthened in the moonlight. Occasionally he gave himself up to waking visions by the waterside, to the tranquil idleness of fishing, or to the culture of his orchard. A dog was his watchful companion. It lay at his bedroom door, rousing him by a sharp rap of the paw when he overslept himself, and the day promised

a cheerful excursion. The moment the poet appeared, his dog led the way to his familiar haunts, brisk with joy, and continually turning its eyes backward. The rugged fisherman and his withered wife, who composed Petrarch's domestic establishment, would have received small satisfaction from the richest rose-leaves he gathered; but to his own vivid sense of sweetness no odour was lost. And doubtless he had days of solitary happiness, when the Muse brought him presents, not less delightful, if less real, than the Homer which he received from the Byzantine ambassador, and placed in rapturous admiration by the side of Plato.

It might be agreeable to look for versions of Saadi's *Apologue* in the studio of the artist; to observe Rubens consecrating his daily occupations with a devotional temper, surrounded by the finest works of ancient genius, and nourishing his imagination by passages from Livy, Virgil, and Plutarch, which an attendant read to to him as he painted. But I turn to portraits more serious. Jewell rose at four o'clock to prayers, and attended the public service in the cathedral at six. The remainder of the morning he gave to study. At mealtime, a chapter having

been read, he amused himself by listening to scholastic arguments between young scholars, whom he entertained at his table. Then his doors and ears were open to all causes. About nine in the evening he called his servants to an account of the day, and admonished them accordingly: "From this examination to his study (how long it is uncertain, oftentimes after midnight), and so to bed; wherein, after some part of an author read to him by the gentleman of his bedchamber, commending himself to the protection of his Saviour, he took his rest."

Good Bishop Hall has furnished a sketch of his own studious life in a letter to Lord Denny. No trait is wanting to complete it. Like his famous contemporary, he was up in summer with the bird that first rises, and in winter often before the sound of any bell. His waking thoughts were given to Him who made the cloud for rest, and the sunshine for toil. While his body was being clothed, he set in order the labours of the day, and, entering his study, besought a blessing for them upon his knees. His words are: "Sometimes I put myself to school to one of those ancients whom the Church hath honoured with the name of Fathers; sometimes to those later

doctors, who want nothing but age to make them classical; always to God's Book." The season of family devotion was now come, and, this duty heartily fulfilled, he returned to his private reading. One while, as he tells us, his eyes were busied, and then his hands, or contemplation took the burden from both; textual divinity employed one hour, controversy another, history a third; and in short intervals of pensive talk with his thoughts, he wound up the scattered threads of learned research for future use. Thus he wore out the calm morning and afternoon, making music with changes.

At length a monitor interrupted him. His weak body grew weary. Before and after meals he let himself loose from scholarship. Then company, discourse, and amusement were welcome. These prepared him for a simple repast, from which he rose capable of more, though not desirous. No book followed his late trencher. The discoveries and thoughts of the day were dilligently recollected, with all the doings of hand and mouth since morning. As the night drew near he shut up his mind, comparing himself to a tradesman who takes in his wares, and closes his windows in the evening. He said that a student lives

miserably who lies down, like a camel, under a full burden. And so, calling his family together, he ended the day with God, and slept, and rose up again, for He sustained him.

Our own century supplies a companion picture. The literary life of Southey was the rose-garden in the pleasantest reading of the allegory. He has recorded the various occupations of the day, and seldom were more costly fancies and religious hopes collected into the space that comes

“Between the lark’s note and the nightingale’s.”

Three pages of history—equal to five of a quarto—were his morning task after breakfast; transcribing, copying for the press, biographical collections, or what else suited his humour, filled up the gaps of leisure until dinner-time. Then a different kind of toil relieved him. He read, wrote letters, saw the newspaper, indulged in a short slumber—for sleep, in his agreeable confession, agreed with his constitution. Tea introduced poetry, and Thalaba or Kehama underwent new trials, or exhibited more wonderful magic. Supper wound up the chain of thought, to strike the hours of another day with the same regularity. And animating all his work is seen a happy, Christian

spirit, ever bringing the future into the present, and sunning itself, by anticipation, in the lights of a brighter communion. Most touching are his words: "When I cease to be cheerful, it is only to become contemplative—to feel at times a wish that I was in that state of existence which passes not away; and this always ends in a new impulse to proceed, that I may leave some durable monument and some efficient good behind me."

Hitherto we have been gazing into the chamber of the scholar, and the dreamer of magnificent dreams; but the cottage window ought to show an interior of beauty after its kind. There is no reason why the brown hand of labour should not hold Thomson, as well as the sickle. Ornamental reading shelters and even strengthens the growth of what is merely useful. A corn-field never returns a poorer crop because a few wild-flowers bloom in the hedge. The refinement of the poor is the triumph of Christian civilisation.

It is growing. And now along the village street or in the lone dwelling to which the green lane winds, we often see some pleasing picture realised. The lending library brings the good man's life, the traveller's peril, or the martyr's victory, to

the winter hearth, and the garden-seat in summer.
Sweeter sights than these cheer our eyes:

“With due respect and joy

I trace the matron at her loved employ ;
What time the striplings, wearied e'en with play
Part at the closing of the summer's day,
And each by different path returns the well-known way,
Then I behold her at her cottage door,
Frugal of light ; her Bible laid before,
When on her double duty she proceeds,
Of time as frugal, knitting as she reads ;
Her idle neighbours, who approach to tell
Some trifling tale, her serious looks compel
To hear reluctant—while the lads who pass,
In pure respect, walk silent on the grass.”

A story is told of a Roman who expended vast sums in purchasing a household of learned slaves. He wished to have the best poets and historians in living editions. One servant recited the whole of the *Iliad*; another chanted the Odes of Pindar. Every standard author had a representative. The free Press has replaced the bondman. Literature is no longer an heirloom, nor can an emperor monopolise Horace. A small outlay obtains a choicer collection of verses than the ancient amateur enjoyed, and without the annoyances to which he was subject. He had no familiar book for a

corner, nor any portable poet to be a companion in a field-walk, or under a tree. Not even Nero could compress a slave into an Elzevir. Moreover, disappointments sometimes occurred. Perhaps the deputy "Pindar" was out of the way; or a sudden indisposition of "Homer" interrupted Ulysses in the middle of an harangue, and left Hector stretching out his arms to the child.

XXVI

ACCOUNTABLENESS OF AUTHORS

FEW objects are more impressive than a large library by moonlight. The deep stillness, the glimmering books, and the lighted shadows upon the floor, affect the mind with a strange solemnity:

“ At the midnight hour,
Slow through that studious gloom the pausing eye,
Led by the glimmering taper, moves around
The sacred volumes of the dead.”

The student puts his hand upon a volume, the legacy of a shining and depraved genius, with a mournful remembrance of the words once uttered in the high-priest's palace. In a very different sense the speech betrays the writer. The sneer, the insult, and the licence, are idioms of the dark kingdom. How contemporaries flattered and successors magnify the author! His vices were weaknesses—the waste splendour of a full

mind. The chisel has touched the stone into his image. His portraits hang in noble galleries; engravings tempt the eye in shop-windows; a thousand pages of panegyric build his epitaph. Presently the whole life and works of the departed man rise clearly before the musing eye, and the Hand that scared the Babylonian seems to flash along the wall, and the letters of fire to start forth—

“By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

No homage to the false charity of the age, nor any fear of its blame, should benumb this instinct of sorrowful apprehension. I am not speaking of the sinfulness which Chaucer and Boccaccio bewailed, and Dryden at least acknowledged; but of that wilful and consistent impiety of which biography offers appalling illustrations. Hume, mocking Heaven upon his dying pillow, rushed headlong, with Lucian's ribaldry on his lips, into the dreadful presence of the Judge; and eyes that weep at a tragedy have no tears of blood for the saddest ever beheld.

Southey was disappointed in being refused admission into Gibbon's garden. But what con-

cern has a Christian with the chamber where Messalina wantoned, or the study in which Aretine blasphemed? Intellectual guilt is to be punished with severity proportioned to its turpitude and destructiveness. A book is even more than the life treasured up which Milton considered it to be. It is the soul disengaged from matter. It is a fountain that flows forever. Jeremy Collier asked, what should be done to the man who lavished his fortune in naturalising a fever, and organised a system of propagating the plague through the post-office? The execration of the world would drive him into the wilderness. Yet it may well be thought that a man had better be defiled in his blood, than his principles.

It has been conjectured, by more than one grand and stern thinker, that a departed spirit may retain a living sympathy with the evil fame and influence of its earthly career, and receive intimations of the corrupting and enduring might of genius in a succession of direful shocks; every quickening of the pulse and clouding of the faith by a voluptuous, or a sceptical book, darting a pang of intolerable agony into the author's heart. Under this affecting view of the accountableness of literature, we may look upon each betrayal to

vice and unbelief as a dismal episode of spiritual torment; upon each deathbed of crime, first taught and cherished by the ministry of the pen, as a sharper sting given to the worm; and upon fathers' and mothers' sighs over lost children, as so many gusts to freshen the flame and the anguish of the middle state.

An interesting anecdote of a great writer, withdrawn from the earth, has been recorded by a friend: "The last time I saw Mr. Wordsworth, he was in deep domestic sorrow, and beginning to bend under the infirmities of old age. 'Whatever,' he said, 'the world may think of me or of my poetry is now of little consequence; but one thing is a comfort of my old age, that none of my works, written since the days of my early youth, contains a line I should wish to blot out because it panders to the baser passions of our nature. 'This,' said he, 'is a comfort to me; I can do no mischief by my works when I am gone.'"

Books, of which the principles are diseased or deformed, must be kept on the shelf of the scholar, as the man of science preserves monsters in glasses. They belong to the study of the mind's morbid anatomy, and ought to be accurately labelled.

Voltaire will still be a wit, notwithstanding he is a scoffer; and we may admire the brilliant spots and eyes of the viper, if we acknowledge its venom and call it a reptile.

But the truth must be spoken—and for such offenders what rebuke is too stern? These are they whose activity of evil grows with their fame; who, red all over with the blood of souls in life, do murder even in their graves. If the servant, who hid his talent in the ground, was driven from his Master's presence into misery, what reward may he look for who puts out his treasure with the dark Exchanger, and traffics in all the merchandise of sin? That author alone fulfils his calling to whom, in some degree, a friend's panegyric of Addison may be applied—that his compositions are but a preface, published on earth, to that grander work of his life which is to be read in heaven.

The accountableness of authors has been enforced; but there is likewise a responsibility of readers. The deep reflection of Davenant admits of a larger application—"The plays of children are punished; the plays of men are excused under the title of business." Readers, whose life is one long task-work of idleness, may recollect

that time is religious money, certain at a future period to be called in; and that a sleepless Eye is keeping the account. The column of debt will show an alarming balance, when the outrages of Eugène Sue, and the politer wickedness of the French lady who calls herself a man, are found to have absorbed the hours, or even the leisure of a week.

Feminine education is beyond the boundary of this discourse. Yet surely the mission of woman demands a higher teaching than modern instruction usually gives. It is an adjustment of mechanism rather than a shaping of mind. One might imagine that the ultimate aim and result of her creation were to be realised, in the pursuit of some flying composer of visionary swiftness; in pasturing uncomfortable cows upon thirsty fields of red chalk; or exhibiting the Great Mogul scowling frightfully in worsted. In this respect the nineteenth century will gain small applause from a parallel with the sixteenth; when the brightest eyes were familiar with Greek, as now with Rosini; and a Latin letter to Ascham about Plato was run off with the fluent grace of an invitation to a wedding. Some thinkers will perceive in those decorations of the mind a lasting fascina-

tion, not always found in later accomplishments, and consider them more likely to win unquiet hearts from wandering and turmoil:

“ To fireside happiness and hours of ease,
Blest with that charm—the certainty to please.”

XXVII

THE CULTIVATED MIND AND THE UNINFORMED

IT was a happy thought to compare a mind, enriched by reading and reflection, to a room in which a person talks with a beautiful woman, among the balmy lights of a summer evening; and to see the image of a mind, neglected and rude, in the same apartment, when the sun is set and the lovely occupant has gone away. The man of taste and learning recognises himself in a figure. The cheering presence of beauty and the magical effects of colour are continually within him; while ignorance sits dark and lonely, till education opens its eyes to the radiance, and unlocks its ears to the charming of the charmer:

“The sweetest Lady of the time,
Well worthy of the golden prime.”

The pleasure is within the reach of all true seekers. The common flower does not grow by

the cottage door more joyfully in the sun and rain. Mirandula mentions a plant whose leaf, taking a strong hold of the earth, shoots up into flourishing branches. The fiction of the Italian seems to be an emblem of knowledge. A winter evening thoughtfully employed may be the leaf, that, striking its root downward and spreading upward, will be covered all over with boughs and fruit. A day opens into a week, a week blossoms into a month, until the persevering learner is embowered and refreshed by the foliage and the clusters of a year. Every fresh acquirement is another remedy against affliction and time. The sick soul possesses a holier hospital for its fever, or its wounds; but literature is often a portico, or outer chamber; and Homer prepared a costly elixir, when he showed Minerva concealing the wrinkles of Ulysses.

A good book has been likened to a well-chosen orchard tree, carefully tended. Its fruits are not of one season. Year by year it yields abundant produce, and often of a mellower flavour. Blanco White, reading Tasso after thirty years of neglect, gives cheering testimony: "If I open the treasures of literature which nourished my mind in youth, I feel young again, and my mind seems

to be transported into the regions of love and beauty, which I can now better enjoy than during the fever of the passions."

Perhaps the calmer industry of the matured taste helps it to find the hidden fragrance. Many flowers—gay and flaunting—the commonest insects may rifle; but only the bee reaches the honey when it lies in a long tube. Moreover, the toil of the bee is always tranquil; its hum ceases over the blossom. From numberless books the fluttering reader—idle and inconstant—bears away the bloom that clings to the outer leaf; but genius has its nectaries, delicate glands, and secrecies of sweetness,—and upon these the thoughtful mind must settle in its labour, before the choice perfume of fancy and wisdom is drawn forth.

The truest blessing of literature is found in the inward light and peace which it bestows. Bentley advised his nephew never to read a book that he could not quote; as if the thrush in the May-leaves did not contradict the caution. The music of wisdom is in the heart.

And this sequestered spirit of meditative enjoyment is recognised in much of our early fancy and learning. Disraeli indicates a certain alarm

at the printing press. The publisher of England's *Helicon* pasted slips over the names of the contributors. Sidney wrote the *Arcadia* for the woods of Wilton. Sackville's Induction to the *Mirror for Magistrates* was sent abroad unacknowledged.

A sincere lover of literature loves it for itself alone; and it rewards his affection. He is sheltered as in a fortress. Whatever troubles and sorrows besiege him outside, his well of water, his corn, and his wine are safe within the walls. The world is shut out. Even in the tumult of great affairs he is undisturbed. Dr. Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, had the two young princes entrusted to his care at the battle of Edgehill; having withdrawn them to a short distance from the fight, he sat down under a hedge, and, taking a book from his pocket, quietly perused it, until a ball from a gun grazed the ground close by, and obliged him to retire.

An affecting instance of the compensations of learning is furnished by the old age of Ussher, when no spectacles could help his failing sight, and a book was dark except beneath the strongest light of the window. Hopeful and resigned, he continued his task, following the sun from room

to room through the house he lived in, until the shadows of trees disappeared from the grass, and the day was gone. How strange and delightful must have been his feelings, when the sunbeam fell brilliantly upon some half-remembered passage, and thought after thought shone out from the misty words like the features of a familiar landscape in a clearing fog.

Pleasant it would be for us, in our gloomier hours, if we might imitate that Indian bird which enjoys the sunshine all the day, and secures a faint reflection of it in the night, by sticking glow-worms over the sides of its nest. And something of this light is obtained from the books read in youth, to be remembered in age:

“And summer’s green all girded up in sheaves.”

Coleridge said that the scenes of his childhood were so deeply written on his mind, that when upon a still, shining day of summer he shut his eyes, the river Otter ran murmuring down the room, with the soft tints of its waters, the willows on the bank, and the coloured sands of its bed. The lover of books cherishes the sweeter memories that endear his solitude, and make it musical.

XXVIII

THE PARTING WORD

I BRING to an end my discourse on the Pleasures of Literature; of many thoughts few have been gathered, while others, perhaps, of richer hues and fragrance, were unplucked, or cast away. It is amusing to observe the different impressions made by the same scenery on a party of travellers. A mountain pass delighted one visitor, while another remembers a glen unknown to his companions, and of extreme loveliness. The readers of this book may resemble the travellers, and complain of fine scenes left out, or of inferior views too elaborately presented. Variety must always be an accident of opinion. But the subject, however considered, is difficult from its extent. A survey of the understanding, in its ornamental developments, has the inconveniences as well as the charms of a walk in a romantic country. The attention is perplexed by agreeable objects on every side. Shadowy paths wind

under trees; lone birds warble far down in the twilight hollows; or some ancient hall, with its mossy terraces, sleeps in the warm valley. The visitor would gladly explore every haunt, but time restrains his feet within the beaten track; short loving pauses are all that he can give, by the blossoming copse, the ivy-grown gate, or the grassy tombs of the hamlet. But the grey manor-house wins most of his regard. It recalls the long gone years to his memory, and he beholds the knight and his train setting out, with cross and armour, for the Sepulchre of the Holy Land. Something of this pensive sadness is felt by the student in his excursion into literature. The varied landscape tempts him from the open road; still paths of meditation whisper calm; distant notes of poetry steal out of unfrequented nooks; stately ruins of wisdom allure his eye; and crumbling graves of the mighty touch him with sympathetic reverence. He, too, lives again in the magnificence of the past. The manor-house with its parting knight is not an empty symbol. What are poets, philosophers, and men of splendid enterprise, but the chivalry of genius, going forth, in the morning of their strength, to vanquish enemies of virtue, release captive souls, and bring

back treasures of renown? How dazzling is the march with fame in the van! Many depart, few return. Some die in battle; some are borne from it wounded; some triumph, only to faint in the desert with the well in sight. So the tale of literature has its toll as well as its trumpet; the coronation encloses a funeral; and the banner of victory droops over the bier of the conqueror. But the eyes and the ears of the living see and hear only the rejoicings and the honours of the departed. The trumpet drowns the toll; the conflict is forgotten in the conquest; the death is illuminated by the crown. So it should be. As one plume sinks, another eager foot climbs the steep. The dead ever speak to the weary, ever cheer the brave, ever beckon the hopeful to the temple, that shines with its own inward sun, and glorifies time with thought.

Whatsoever in these pages I have written of literature and its pleasures belongs to the dignified efforts of the mind—to the imagination that embellishes life, and the philosophy that ennobles it. The true scholar drinks from the fountains which taste keeps pure; the corrupted streams of popular entertainment flow by him unheeded. Learning, chastened and sanctified, he numbers

with the most precious blessings and endearments of home; when clasping the hand of religion it becomes its vassal and its friend. By this union he obtains the tenderness and the guidance of two companions loving and beloved, redoubling his joys in health, bringing flowers to his pillow in sickness, and shedding the glory and the peace of the past over the blackness and consternation of the present.

BOOKS QUOTED

Gray's Letters to Walpole, 1747.
Owen Feltham's Resolves.
Du Choix des Études.
Gilpin's Observations on the West of England.
Pope's Essay on Criticism.
Stewart's Life of Robertson.
Gibbon's Roman Empire.
Jeremy Collier's Essays, Part ii.
Homer's Odyssey, translated by Cowper.
Gray's Letters.
Pope's Works.
Stewart's Philosophical Essays.
Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination.
Hume's Essays.
Spectator, No. 37.
De Staël—Of Literature.
Schlegel's Æsthetic and Miscellaneous Works.
Hallam's Introduction to Literature of Europe.
Helvetius, De l'Esprit.
Shenstone's Works.
V. Marville—Mélanges.
P. Knight's Analytical Principles of Taste.
Hurd's Works.
Shaftesbury's Works.
Reynolds's Discourses.
Alison's Essays on Taste.
Gilpin's First Essay on Picturesque Beauty.

Pleasures of Literature

Spenser's Faëry Queen.
 Twining's Dissertations to Aristotle on Poetry.
 Edwards's Canons of Criticism.
 Pope's Dunciad, Bk. iv.
 Bacon's Advancement of Learning.
 Selden's Table-Talk.
 Trublet, *Essais sur divers Sujets de Littérature*.
 Charles Lamb's Elia.
 Mitford's Life of Parnell.
 Disraeli's Miscellanies.
 Cowley's Essays.
 Johnsoniana—Hawkins.
 Elrington's Life of Ussher.
 Fell's Life of Hammond.
 Sir W. Temple's Works.
 Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*.
 Jortin's Tracts.
 Opie's Lectures.
 Bishop Newton's Works.
 Fontenelle.
 Middleton's Life of Cicero.
 Pascal *Pensées*, *Seconde Partie*.
 Secker's Works by Porteus.
 Dryden's Prose Works by Malone.
 Berkeley's Works.
 Warburton's Letters.
 Eastlake's Literature of the Fine Arts.
 Burnet's Notes on Reynolds.
 Martin Sherlock's Letters from a Traveller.
 Pope's Preface to Shakespeare.
 Davenant's Preface to Gondibert.
 Warton's Essay on Pope.
 Butler's Hudibras.
 Mitford's edition of Gray's Works.
 Spence—On Pope's Odyssey, Evening v.
 Derham's Physico-Theology.

James Montgomery's Lectures.
 Leigh Hunt's Imagination and Fancy.
 Coleridge's Literary Remains.
 Warton's Observations on the Faëry Queen.
 Dryden—On Dramatic Poesy.
 Hurd—On Art of Poetry.
 Earl's Eastern Seas
 A. W. Schlegel—On Dramatic Art.
 Rambler, Nos. iv. and clvi.
 Burney's Life of Metastasio.
 Azais—Des Compensations.
 Disraeli's Amenities.
 Price's Preface to Warton's History.
 Crabbe's Works.
 Foster's Essays.
 Piozzi's British Synonymy.
 Robert Hall's Miscellaneous Works.
 Sir Thomas Browne's Christian Morals, Part iii.
 Fuller's Worthies of England.
 Hayley's Poetical Works.
 Lanzi's History of Painting.
 Stewart's Account of Robertson.
 Mitchell's Knights of Aristophanes.
 Donne's Sermons.
 Miller's Bampton Lectures.
 Henry Smith's Sermons.
 Seed's Discourses at the Lady Moyer's Lecture.
 Young—On Original Composition.
 Sedgwick's Discourses on the Studies of Cambridge.
 Life of Blanco White, by Thom.
 Montesquieu, De l'Esprit des Loix.
 Foster's Contributions to the Eclectic Review.
 Southey's Letters.
 Walsh's Preface to Aristophanes.

A New Book by
ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

Now Ready

BESIDE STILL WATERS

Uniform with the "Upton Letters"

A record of the sentiments, the changing opinions, and the quiet course of life of a young man whom an unexpected legacy has freed from the necessity of leading an active life in the world of affairs. The book aims to win men back to the joys of peaceful work, and simplicity, and friendship, and quiet helpfulness. It is, too, a protest against the rule or tyranny of convention, the appetite for luxury, power, excitement and strong sensation.

9th Impression.

Earlier Books by Mr. Benson

FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

"Mr. Benson has written nothing equal to this mellow and full-flavored book. From cover to cover it is packed with personality; from phrase to phrase it reveals a thoroughly sincere and unaffected effort of self-expression; full-orbed and four-square, it is a piece of true and simple literature."

London Chronicle.

10th Impression.

THE UPTON LETTERS

"A piece of real literature of the highest order, beautiful and fragrant. To review the book adequately is impossible. . . . It is in truth a precious thing."—*Week's Survey.*

"A book that we have read and reread if only for the sake of its delicious flavor. There has been nothing so good of its kind since the *Etchingham Letters*. The letters are beautiful, quiet, and wise, dealing with deep things in a dignified way."

Christian Register.

Crown 8vo, Each, \$1.25 Net.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York

London

Shelburne Essays

By Paul Elmer More

4 vols. Crown octavo.

Sold separately. Net, \$1.25. (By mail \$1.35)

Contents

FIRST SERIES: A Hermit's Notes on Thoreau—The Solitude of Nathaniel Hawthorne—The Origins of Hawthorne and Poe—The Influence of Emerson—The Spirit of Carlyle—The Science of English Verse—Arthur Symonds: The Two Illusions—The Epic of Ireland—Two Poets of the Irish Movement—Tolstoy; or, The Ancient Feud between Philosophy and Art—The Religious Ground of Humanitarianism.

SECOND SERIES: Elizabethan Sonnets—Shakespeare's Sonnets—Lafcadio Hearn—The First Complete Edition of Hazlitt—Charles Lamb—Kipling and FitzGerald—George Crabbe—The Novels of George Meredith—Hawthorne: Looking before and after—Delphi and Greek Literature—Nemesis; or, The Divine Envy.

THIRD SERIES: The Correspondence of William Cowper—Whittier the Poet—The Centenary of Sainte-Beuve—The Scotch Novels and Scotch History—Swinburne—Christina Rossetti—Why is Browning Popular?—A note on Byron's "Don Juan"—Laurence Sterne—J. Henry Shorthouse—The Quest.

FOURTH SERIES: The Vicar of Morwenstow—Fanny Burney—A note on "Daddy" Crisp—George Herbert—John Keats—Benjamin Franklin—Charles Lamb Again—Walt Whitman—William Blake—The Letters of Horace Walpole—The Theme of Paradise Lost.

A Few Press Criticisms on Shelburne Essays

"It is a pleasure to hail in Mr. More a genuine critic, for genuine critics in America in these days are uncommonly scarce. . . . We recommend, as a sample of his breadth, style, acumen, and power the essay on Tolstoy in the present volume. That represents criticism that has not merely a metropolitan but a world note. . . . One is thoroughly grateful to Mr. More for the high quality of his thought, his serious purpose, and his excellent style."—*Harvard Graduates' Magazine*.

"We do not know of any one now writing who gives evidence of a better critical equipment than Mr. More. It is rare nowadays to find a writer so thoroughly familiar with both ancient and modern thought. It is this width of view, this intimate acquaintance with so much of the best that has been thought and said in the world, irrespective of local prejudice, that constitute Mr. More's strength as a critic. He has been able to form for himself a sound literary canon and a sane philosophy of life which constitute to our mind his peculiar merit as a critic."—*Independent*.

"He is familiar with classical, Oriental, and English literature; he uses a temperate, lucid, weighty, and not ungraceful style; he is aware of his best predecessors, and is apparently on the way to a set of philosophic principles which should lead him to a high and perhaps influential place in criticism. . . . We believe that we are in the presence of a critic who must be counted among the first who take literature and life for their theme."—*London Speaker*.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York London

A Sterling Piece of Literary Work

THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

BY

ELISABETH LUTHER CARY

Author of "The Rossettis," "William Morris," etc.

WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY BY FREDERICK A. KING

Crown octavo. With Portrait in Photogravure.

Net, \$1.25 (By mail, \$1.35)

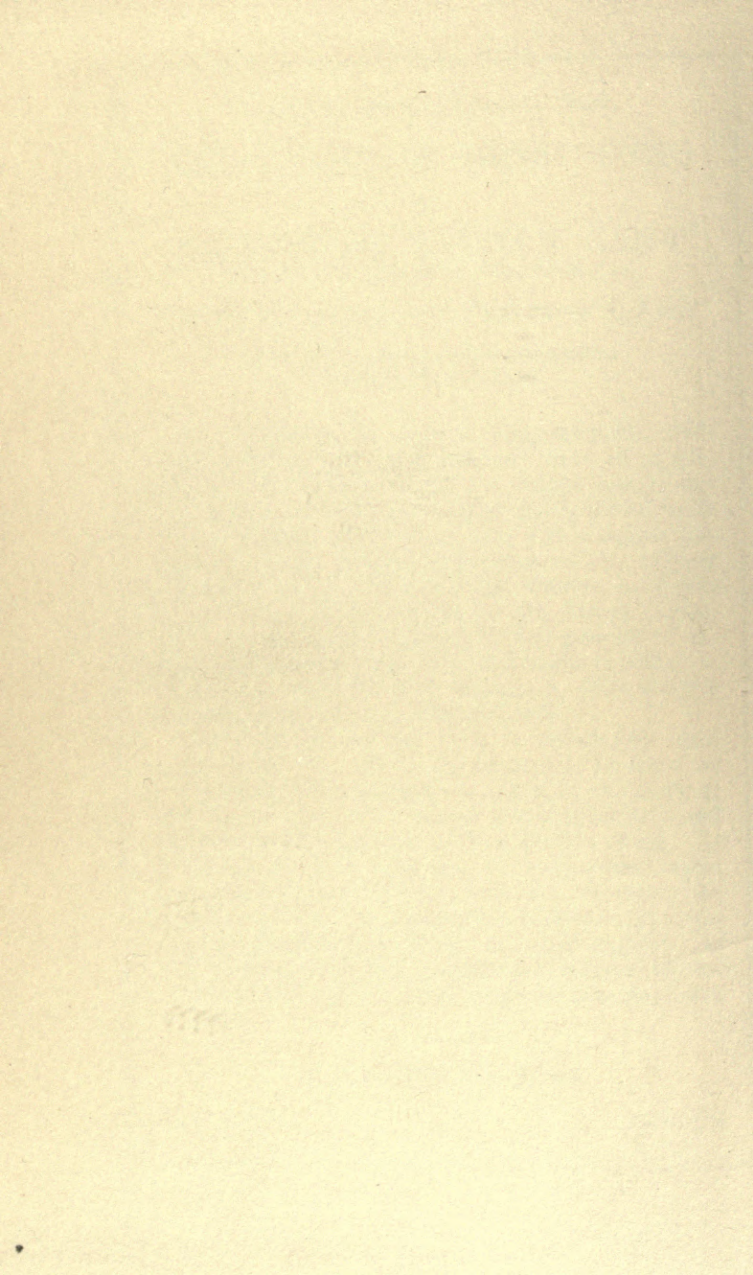
All of Miss Cary's work in biography and criticism is marked by the distinct note of appreciation. In such a spirit she brings her reader into close touch with the mental and spiritual traits of each author, and leaves him with a deeper impression of the general influences of the subject chosen for study. In her latest volume, a critical interpretation of the novels of Mr. Henry James, she has a theme well suited to her powers of insight and illumination, and as a trained writer, a student of character and literature, Miss Cary is well equipped for her congenial task.

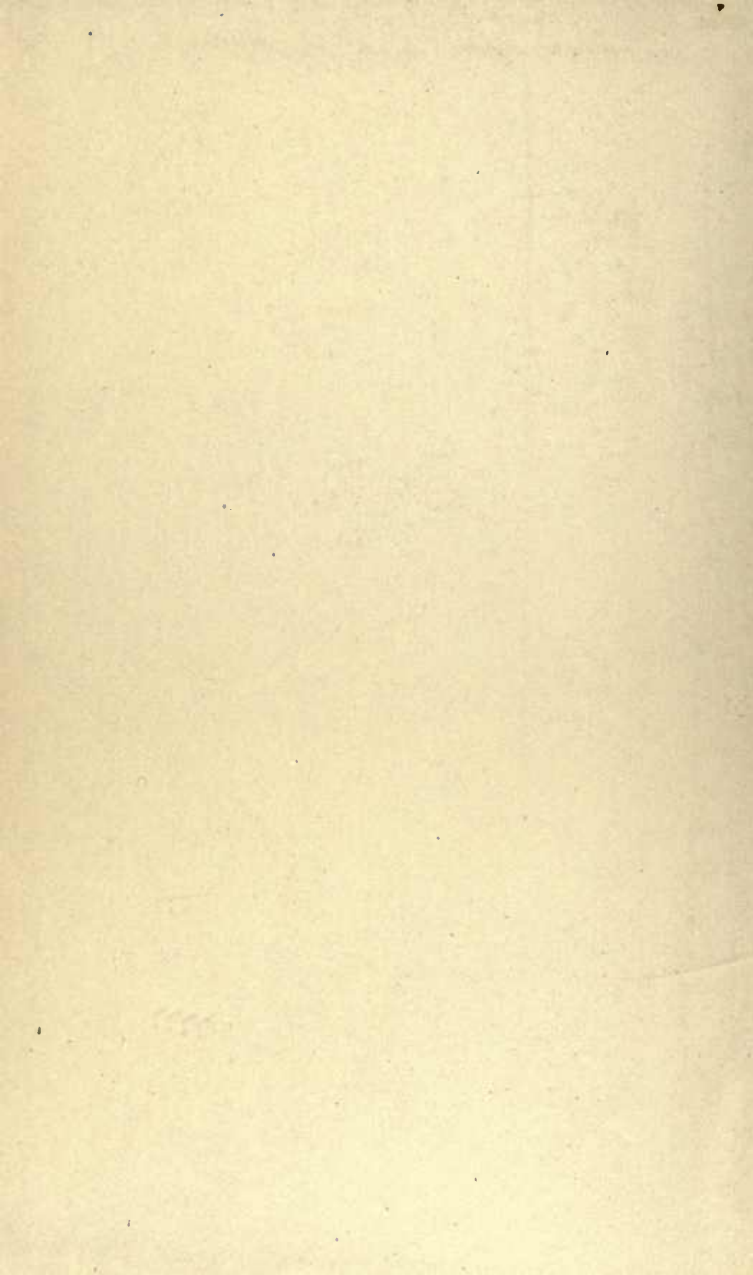
The intention of the book is sufficiently indicated by its title. It is an attempt to fix more or less definitely the impression given by the work of Mr. James taken as a whole accomplishment and reviewed with reference to its complete effect. It is not so much a criticism as a comment upon the author's point of view and the inferences he draws from life. An exhaustive bibliography compiled by Frederick A. King, arranged logically as well as chronologically, completes a remarkably interesting and well rounded piece of contemporary criticism

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON





fm

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 106 476 5

